

NIXON'S LOYALISTS
INSIDE THE WAR FOR THE WHITE HOUSE, 1972

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ABSTRACT

The objective of this study is to revisit the American presidential election of 1972 via the interpretive lens of Richard Nixon's loyal inner circle. It argues that the Watergate scandal that forced Nixon to resign the presidency two years later has minimized the meaning of that watershed event. The massive landslide victory by the Nixon administration at the polls has been lost in the details of the break-in at the Watergate complex. The result is that the connection between Nixon, his loyal White House aides, and the millions of faithful supporters is minimized and even forgotten in the scholarship on the 37th president. Nixon is too often seen as an isolated and disconnected leader, and consequently, the second greatest margin of victory in American presidential history has been largely neglected as a significant event in the literature. Supported and informed by archival documents, staff memoirs, newspaper accounts, and secondary sources, this study revisits the election through the eyes and actions of the president's men, concluding that his team developed a specific strategy to attract traditional Democratic voters, independents and disaffected voters, forging a post-1960s consensus. This outcome was aided by a strategy to portray Democratic opponent George McGovern as an extremist unpalatable to the American heartland. Nixon's image as a lonely and isolated figure inside the Oval Office has been misunderstood as it was also part of a specific strategy hatched by his inner circle after the midterm elections of 1970 to have the politician act "presidential" and remain in the White House, above the nasty fight for votes on the campaign trail. Nixon and his loyal aides used these strategies to reach the 'silent majority' of Americans, and thereby secured an overwhelming victory.

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INTRODUCTION

Dust swirled and danced through the afternoon sky as the presidential motorcade moved through another in a long line of rural counties. As the miles flew past, Richard Nixon gazed at his fellow Americans from behind the glass of his midnight blue limousine, watching as they waved, clapped, and held handmade signs. One sign in particular caught the president's attention. It stated, "No amnesty. We lost our son in Vietnam." The veteran politician ordered the long automobile over to the side of the road and walked back to where the family stood. "I talked to the mother, to the father, to the brother of the man who had been killed," Nixon said, recalling the encounter as he had with so many others over his long political career. "I shook hands with them," he remembered, conscious of his appearance in his customary dark blue suit as he stood with the farm family on the side of the road. "Anyone who has been in politics and who shakes hands a lot can tell a lot about people by how they shake hands . . . the feel of their hands. I shook hands with the man . . . he obviously was a working man . . . a farmer. It was a calloused hand . . . strong and firm." The stronger impression for the president, however, came from the mother. "Her hands also were somewhat rough . . . and they were red. She obviously cannot have a dishwasher, and she didn't have all those fancy things that you read about in *Vogue* . . . I thought about my own mother and father. My father had hard hands, too, because he worked all of his life. My mother's hands were not pretty, but I always thought they were beautiful because I knew how much she did and how hard she worked, all day baking pies at 4:00 o'clock in the morning to send four kids to college . . ."¹

Politics for Richard Nixon were always personal: rough hands, hard, bittersweet memories, a curious mixture of high expectations and curdled resentment. As with millions of his fellow citizens, however, Nixon's essential outlook on the circumstances of life was not unique. Indeed, his views were part of a larger American story shared by people across the heartland who believed in the rhetoric of hard work over patronage, national service over self-interest, and hope over despair. While in many ways an enigmatic figure, Nixon was also a significant political force who never had to go it alone in his political life, and seldom did. As with the farm family on the side of the road, the butcher's son drew solid support from the American people for more than a generation, supporters who had opened doors for him since the beginning of his political career and checked the box by his name on Election Day at every step along the way. Through his election to both houses of Congress, as vice president of the United States, a bid for the presidency in 1960, a gubernatorial run in California in 1962, to his triumphant return to the political arena in 1968, Nixon always benefited from uncountable committed followers. Some had rough hands and toiled in the golden fields of Nebraska and Iowa and others donned shirts and ties and occupied the halls of Brown and Georgetown.

Richard Nixon's well documented personal contradictions coupled with his inglorious political epitaph, however, has limited discussions concerning the long-standing support the politician enjoyed among the American electorate. Too often, the weight of Nixon's personal demons have come to define him in regards to domestic politics, where the former president's image is little more than a dark and brooding persona that was "cut off from the rest of

¹ From Richard Nixon's address to his surrogates in the Cabinet Room, October 29, 1972. Please see memorandum from David C. Hoopes to The President's File, October 29, 1972, President's Office Files, Box 90, National Archives Records Administration, hereafter NARA, and memorandum from the President to H.R. Haldeman, July 24, 1972, Contested Files, White House Special Files, Box 35, Nixon Library.

humanity” or “alone in the White House.”² Although the historical record indicates that Nixon was awkward in his personal relationships, had few close friends, and “even his dog didn’t like him,” these characteristics do not explain his exceedingly successful public career, including his controversial White House years.³ Nixon’s inherent contradictions did not prevent him from leading a fearsome squad of committed and loyal combatants, and, in many ways, from becoming a representational figure who dominated and reflected much of the post-war political terrain in America. Some influential historians, however, contend that Nixon only reflected his own darkness: a troubled, isolated, criminal soul revealed in enemy lists, Oval Office expletives, and clumsy but determined burglars with flashlights.

As respected historian Stanley Kutler has concluded, Nixon’s long political career must be filtered through the dark lens of Watergate. The man from Yorba Linda cannot be viewed significantly beyond this scandal and the associated abuses of power. In his view, the politician is the lone, responsible player, a reference not merely to Watergate but to his entire political career. Moreover, although Kutler maintains that the president’s men should fade into a “well-deserved obscurity,” these “spear carriers” were neither suits from central casting nor an infinitesimal clique of reactionary conservatism. Indeed, they were men who themselves represented a significant cross-section of the nation’s populace, exhibiting many of the same hopes, fears, and assumptions as others in Middle America, and they were fiercely loyal to Richard Nixon.⁴

As historian David Greenberg has accurately pointed out in his intelligently conceived *Nixon’s Shadow*, it is important for history to understand how people remember the president, and what he meant to those most close to him at the time. “Understanding a president’s importance requires reaching beyond policy to appreciate the feelings and reactions he inspired from the people he led.”⁵ But even for scholars such as Greenberg, transcending what happened at the offices of the Democratic National Committee and the image of Nixon as the dark and lonely political persona trapped in the White House under the shadow of Watergate is problematic. Historian Joan Hoff (whose favorable retelling of Nixon’s domestic achievements was met with harsh criticism) suggests that even sympathetic scholars such as Iwan Morgan and the aforementioned David Greenberg who agree that the president did indeed achieve more during his time in power than is acknowledged, “conclude that Watergate will remain the negative scrim through which those achievements must be viewed because it so tarnished his image and reputation.”⁶

Indeed, Greenberg reminds us that the president’s death in April 1994 did little to change the lasting image that the scandal wrought. “Obituaries did not start with his trip to China, his crusades for forgotten Americans, his victimization, or his Great Society agenda. They did start with Watergate.”⁷ Nixon scholar Melvin Small argues that there are good reasons for this. As the historian has pointed out, “One can easily make the case that Watergate was emblematic of

² Please see Richard Reeves, *President Nixon: Alone in the White House* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 2001).

³ See Elizabeth Drew, *Richard M. Nixon: The American Presidents Series: The 37th President, 1969-1974* (New York: Times Books, 2007), 45.

⁴ Stanley Kutler, *The Wars of Watergate: The Last Crisis of Richard Nixon* (New York, NY: Knopf, 1990), 617.

⁵ David Greenberg, *Nixon’s Shadow: The History of an Image* (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 2003), 336-337.

⁶ Joan Hoff, “How Neo-Conservatives Helped Bring Down Richard Nixon,” February 21, 2005, George Mason University’s History News Network, <http://hnn.us/articles/10327.html>. Please see also Iwan Morgan’s *Nixon* (London and New York: Arnold/Oxford University Press, 2002).

⁷ Greenberg, *Nixon’s Shadow*, 345.

Nixon's behavior throughout his career."⁸ There is a downside to Watergate as the primary lens to the president's political soul, however, as the break-in and the associated abuses of power have tended to reflect back and explain too many events darkly, including the idea that the scandal unequivocally supports the conclusion that the president was fatefully secluded in the White House. Although Nixon was unquestionably a troubled, joyless, and intensely private individual, Watergate has served to magnify these traits inordinately, contributing to a misleading representation of his isolation within the White House. It is apparent in the writing of historians who present the Nixon presidency both favorably and unfavorably.⁹

It should not surprise that the Watergate scandal that brought about Nixon's political demise has produced much of the scholarship concerning his administration's political activities, particularly the details of his reelection bid in 1972. The few works that deal even indirectly with that election year have been largely comprised of tales of dirty tricks and a White House enmeshed in damage control over the break-in at the headquarters of the Democratic National Committee. While Watergate was a significant historical event, representing an important part of the president's complex makeup, the weight of that historical episode has rendered his reelection landslide victory almost a footnote in the scholarship. An election year seemingly dominated by burglaries and political malfeasance by Nixon campaign functionaries, however, does not explain why a clear majority of adult Americans voted to send Richard Nixon back into the White House in 1972, as his administration claimed 49 out of 50 states that November.¹⁰

An investigation deep within Nixon's inner circle during the day-to-day efforts to build a winning strategy to retake the White House shows not a fixation with the execution of dirty tricks or even an obsession with the possible ramifications of Watergate, but a pragmatic political response to what they perceived was the mood of the great middle spectrum of American voters. By lifting the veil of Watergate and revisiting the seminal reelection campaign of 1972, this dissertation hopes to explain the apparent connection between the president and the greater American population that supported him and his administration with an overwhelming victory in November of that year, and how his loyal team inside the White House made it happen.

Rather than a history of an American presidential election, or an examination of an administration's foreign and domestic policies, this study is an investigation into the political animal that was Richard Nixon's inner circle during the election year of 1972. That political

⁸ Melvin Small, *The Presidency of Richard Nixon* (Lawrence, KS: University Press of Kansas, 1999), 310.

⁹ Please see Herbert Parmet, *Richard Nixon and His America* (Boston: Little, Brown, 1990), 610, and Tom Wicker, *One of Us: Richard Nixon and the American Dream* (New York, NY: Random House, 1991), 652, 653. Interestingly, the image of a Nixon White House shrouded in darkness remains largely unchallenged even by Small, Parmet, and Wicker, though certainly—and curiously—many of their observations appear to contradict this representation. See also Michael A. Genovese, *The Nixon Legacy: Power and Politics in Turbulent Times* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1990), 241. Joan Hoff, "How Neo-Conservatives Helped Bring Down Richard Nixon."

¹⁰ Affording untoward reinforcement to Nixon as dark loner was historian Arthur Schlesinger Jr., who as the general editor for the American Presidents series, chose not a fellow historian to pen a new biography on Richard Nixon but Watergate-era and veteran journalist Elizabeth Drew. See Drew's *Richard M. Nixon*. The journalist's portrayal of the 37th president is especially acidic, written more from the standpoint of a Nixon nemesis than biographer. Indeed, it is not qualitatively different than the intriguing personality and psychoanalytical inquiries (with pseudo-medical subtexts) on Nixon, which for all of their readability, have not explained the ascension of a young man from Whittier to the highest offices in the land. Please see Fawn Brodie, *Richard Nixon, The Shaping of His Character* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1981), and Anthony Summer's *The Arrogance of Power* (New York: Viking, 2000).

entity—the president’s White House team—was arguably as complex and contradictory as Nixon himself, a hardnosed but insightful partisan assemblage that reached out to the nation’s heartland and secured a landslide of historical proportions. *Nixon’s Loyalists* tells the little known story of the strategy hatched by the president’s men in the immediate aftermath of the disappointing mid-term elections of 1970 to keep the career politician in the White House and out of his own campaign. During the reelection campaign, key Nixon aides including Pat Buchanan, Charles Colson, H.R. Haldeman, Dwight Chapin, John Ehrlichman, Bill Safire, Jeb Magruder, Larry Higby, Ken Cole, Gordon Strachan, and John Mitchell kept the “fighting president” safely sequestered inside the Oval Office acting ‘presidential’ while carefully scripted surrogates, including Bob Dole, John Connally, John Tower, Barry Goldwater, and Edward Gurney took the Nixon epistle to the people. Nixon’s dedicated political team planned to mitigate his rougher or “unlikable” qualities, while reconnecting the president with those in Middle America it sensed would back him at the polls. This benefaction hinged on preventing their boss from contributing to the public unease, fear, and fatigue following a decade of shock and upheaval. Nixon’s team adjusted, repackaged, and projected a safe, bucolic image of the politician for nationwide consumption. While his men were opportunists, their efforts were not purely cynical in approach. They reflected both like-mindedness and an acute understanding of the nation’s mood—a mood that appeared both weary and fearful of continued unrest on the streets and campuses across the nation.

The result was in many ways the team’s successful, if short-lived, effort to build a post-1960s consensus of moderate Democrats, Republicans, and independents, not unlike the big tent majority enjoyed by Dwight Eisenhower in the 1950s or the one Lyndon Johnson brought home in 1964. Indeed, the landslide of 1972 revealed not so much a fractured and divided nation, as argued by historian Rick Perlstein but one that appeared to be quite willing to follow the lead of Richard Milhous Nixon and his loyal men.¹¹ While deep divisions existed in the nation between the largely young left-leaning minority and the very real silent majority identified by Nixon, the appearance of a divided country was largely a facade, colored by television images of protesting youth and burning flags. It was a reality that the president and his men belatedly recognized and seized upon, making Democratic nominee George McGovern appear to be even more of a minority candidate than he actually was.

This work will also be the first to drill down deep into both the origins and the execution of the electoral strategy hatched by Nixon’s team after 1970 to retake the White House. It provides a detailed investigation into the operation to both divide their challengers and build a new coalition from the remnants of the Democratic Party. It will provide a new view of the team’s efforts to capture a “Republican majority,” efforts that depended on portraying the Democrats as the party that represented a noisy, violent minority, an entity that catered to its friends in the “Eastern Establishment.” The collaborative efforts of key strategists such as Pat Buchanan and Charles Colson with their engaged and passionate staffers crafted a strategy that set out to portray their opponents as the “ins,” and the incumbent administration as the “outs”—men who represented the “forgotten” citizens in Middle America. Reflecting their own discontent with the nation’s trajectory, Nixon’s men labeled Democrat George McGovern as an extremist unpalatable to the heartland and outside the mainstream of American political life, underscoring their opponent’s self-immolation. It was a plan that drew from another massive

¹¹ In Rick Perlstein’s fascinating *Nixonland*, the historian argues that division, not consensus, ruled the day in 1972. See *Nixonland: The Rise of a President and the Fracturing of a Nation* (New York: Scribner, 2008).

landslide, where Lyndon Johnson built a massive majority by portraying Republican challenger Barry Goldwater as an extremist outside the mainstream of American thought. In this fight between “elites” and the defenders of “real” Americans, the old Nixon “enemy”—the media—was enlisted as an unwitting ally to deliver to voters the Nixonian message and the image of Democratic candidates as radicals and extremists. As such, it reveals that the behavior of the Washington press corps and the national media towards the Nixon administration was largely favorable during the campaign of 1972. What this dissertation will reveal is that the team’s purposeful electoral “front-porch” strategy to keep Nixon inside the White House has become misunderstood as presidential isolation.

This dissertation also shows that what ostensibly were the biggest feathers in Richard Nixon’s political cap in 1972—the administration’s foreign policy initiatives—were largely separated from the political activities. It is clear that the president wished to avoid sparring with his Democratic opponents on these issues because he believed that he already held the winning diplomatic cards and such political skirmishes would only sully his achievements. While Nixon’s historic trip to China, détente with the Soviet Union, and achieving an “honorable” end to the war in Vietnam were crucial to the president’s self image as a statesman, they seldom appeared to play a significant part of the overall or even the day-to-day campaign strategy. Whereas the timing of a peace treaty with Hanoi was indeed managed for political reasons, the overarching issues of Vietnam—amnesty, peace treaties, and POWS—played no central role in the campaign strategy. Nixon’s team knew from the polls that a majority would back the president over anyone in the Democratic field based upon his stance against amnesty for draft resisters and for “peace with honor” in Vietnam. It was no different with his bold diplomatic overtures with Moscow and China. Indeed, in the election of 1972, the strategy of keeping ‘Nixon the statesman’ isolated from the political campaign was a clear winner. By raising the president above skirmishes with the counterculture and the antiwar movement, the team limited its opponents’ ability to characterize the incumbent’s behavior as more of the same from “tricky Dick.”

This dissertation will contribute to the scholarship on the Nixon presidency in a number of other ways. It will provide the first stand-alone study of the president’s reelection campaign of 1972 since Theodore H. White’s *The Making of the President, 1972*, published in 1974, and offer a much-needed look at the often-volatile internal political dynamic inside the Nixon White House. In the process, this work will challenge charter myths, including that Nixon’s Chief of Staff, H.R. Haldeman, was a gatekeeper who isolated the president inside the Oval Office and that dirty tricks, rather than a sophisticated multi-level form of nuanced political hardball, characterized the 1972 campaign.¹²

This work is not a defense of Richard Nixon, nor is it an attempt to minimize the historical importance of Watergate and the associated abuses of power, as such events represent an unfortunate part of his administration and a dark corner of the president’s complex personality. What the study will show, however, is how the scandal and Nixon’s subsequent resignation inadvertently has kept some important insights from the historical record, among them that dirty tricks, including the Watergate break-in, had little to do with the landslide election victory of 1972. Ultimately, if Nixon did indeed reflect only the political darkness, then

¹² As will be discussed in later chapters, there is ample evidence to suggest that Haldeman mostly approved of the hardball tactics that came and went through the Oval Office doors courtesy of Chuck Colson and others in the inner circle. The image of Haldeman as gatekeeper is reinforced in Nixon scholarship over the past thirty years, from Stanley Kutler to Elizabeth Drew, including by staff in their memoirs. The way the Nixon White House actually operated belies this widely held belief.

historians must wrangle not just with the late president and his faithful supporters within the White House but also with those in the vast American heartland who demonstratively supported this highly recognizable politician to his great benefit for almost three decades. After all, Richard Nixon's warts had been visible long before anyone outside the beltway had heard of the Watergate complex in downtown Washington, D.C.

Nixon's Loyalists is drawn from an immense collection of rich historical sources (most not available to Theodore White), numerous underutilized and seldom used (with respect to the 1972 presidential election) archival documents, memoranda, letters, briefing notes, as well as the White House Tapes, scores of them recently released, as well as extensive national and regional polling data. This dissertation also revisits the many staff memoirs from Nixon's inner circle. Examining the president's closest political advisers who were themselves part of the post-war American story provides a pathway to understanding the complexity of the Nixon White House, a character that was in full expression during the reelection campaign. To understand Nixon and his times, it is crucial to expose the president's dynamic inner circle, a political animal that was ready to pull the meat from the bone during what was to be the final campaign for one of the more influential and remarkable American politicians in the last half of the 20th century.

Nixon's Loyalists is divided into eight chapters. Chapter 1: Heartland Homilies outlines the team's shifting strategy for election year, away from a combative president to one that spoke in prosaic terms to the heartland. It details the emerging decision to divide the Democrats and build a new coalition from that party's traditional voting blocs. Chapter 2: "Holy" Warriors, looks at the key figures among the president's political team, its style of attack, and its preparations for waging "holy war" against its opponents. Chapter 3: Unhorsing Big Ed, details the successful effort to destroy the assumed front-runner for the Democratic ticket, Edmund Muskie. It will trace the rapid-fire approach to undercutting Democratic rivals as they emerged and the effort to help decide for the Democrats who would lead them into the fall election. Chapter 4: The Making of an Extremist, outlines the manner in which the president's team portrayed George McGovern as an elitist radical, a representative of the far-left. Chapter 5: Above the Battle, traces the strategy to keep the president safely sequestered in the White House, acting presidential, while senior staff and surrogates did his bidding with the media and the public. It also reveals the depth of partisanship and infighting among the president's team as it drove for the total electoral destruction of George McGovern, while Nixon remained in the Oval office and out of the public campaign. Under the domination of Charles Colson we see that the process of politics often trumped the particulars of policy. Chapter 6: The Front-Porch Campaign investigates the inner circle's unorthodox approach to electioneering, as the president behaved like he was not in a campaign while his team descends upon McGovern and his running mate Sargent Shriver, painting them as radicals, and outside the American mainstream. Chapter 7: A Bitter Harvest examines the team's furious get-out-the-vote machine, where overconfidence was matched with a growing fear of losing, even though every poll suggested otherwise. It will trace the final days leading up to November and the edgy election aftermath in the White House. Chapter 8: "A Mandate for Realism," serves as the conclusion, summing up what I have found and assessing both the election and its meaning to the era. It will provide an appraisal of the internal character of the Nixon presidency and how it appeared to connect with the American heartland.

Nixon Historiography

The scholarship on Richard Nixon covers an expansive terrain, from complete biographies to a myriad of monographs examining seemingly every minutia of his foreign and domestic policy. The immense historiography on the 37th president, however, proceeds down many fascinating and contradictory pathways. Nixon is captured in various discordant images: he is Dwight Eisenhower's ideological pit bull, the rabid anti-Communist persecutor of Alger Hiss, the enemy of the American left, yet an unprofessed liberal who accomplished more for civil rights than his two Democratic predecessors combined did. Nixon is the villain of Vietnam, Cambodia, and Kent State, but the farsighted diplomat with China and the Soviet Union. He is a man quiet and unknowable, nonetheless revealed intimately as a prude or a closet homosexual. Nixon is both the president of the United States of America and the man from the wrong side of the tracks. If John Kennedy was a coin's head, Dick Nixon was certainly its tail.¹³

Through the maze of contrasting images, however, Watergate has played a disproportionate role in shaping both public memory and historiography on the important election year of 1972. Perhaps it was largely inevitable. Even though the man who rose from the edge of poverty in a small frame house in Yorba Linda, California, was among the most influential politicians in the last half of the 20th century, his resignation in the face of certain impeachment over the break-in at the headquarters of the Democratic National Committee casts the longest shadow over scholarship, producing a disproportionate number of works on the politician after 1974. The result is that even though scholarship on the Nixon presidency has moved on to cover many elements of his domestic and foreign policy achievements, it has not revisited and thus explained the landslide of 1972.

Significant post-reelection literature on the Nixon presidency (yet unaffected by Watergate) is relegated largely to veteran journalist and presidential biographer, Theodore H. White. White's *The Making of the President, 1972*, published in early 1974 but written before the fallout from the scandal had felled the Nixon administration, is a fluid narrative of the '72 election, a boots-on-the-ground view, revealing a divided nation, one still facing a war in Vietnam and at war at home. The issues transcended mere demonstrative antiwar protesters but included a litany of social, economic, and racial issues, including the contentious question of school busing. White details a year of trials and tribulations as the incumbent president faced reelection, the opening to China, and promises for a resolution in Vietnam, all while revealing how the Nixon team set upon an error-filled campaign run by their Democratic opponent, George McGovern. Written before the Watergate scandal had a chance to take prisoners, White's account is not a historical assessment of the election, but one that records the drumbeat of that year, capturing the unsteady cadence of the political landscape. White concludes that even had the McGovern camp made all the right moves instead of all the wrong ones, a Nixon victory was almost inevitable in 1972. While highlighting initiatives in China, the Soviet Union, and a plan for peace with honor in Southeast Asia, the Nixon team portrayed McGovern as a "radical" at

¹³ See Thomas Johnson's *The Rehabilitation of Richard Nixon: The Media's Effect on Collective Memory* (New York, Garland, 1995); David Greenberg's well-argued *Nixon's Shadow*, and Perlstein's *Nixonland* for interesting and informative discussions of Nixon's historical image.

home. In the wake of the massive landslide, White's only surprise is that Nixon did not win by an even wider margin.¹⁴

With the president forced from office in August of 1974, however, White had the opportunity to assess Nixon's presidency, and thus offered the first in a long list of post-Watergate literature. In the author's *Breach of Faith*, published in 1975, White traces the final hours of the Nixon administration as it disintegrated into pieces with seemingly all of them under indictment. Gone is the more benign portrayal of the president during the '72 campaign, and in its place is Nixon the criminal who found the perfect sidekick in H.R. Haldeman, his chief of staff, and the one man who could turn the president's words into deeds. White concludes, "The true crime of Richard Nixon was simple: he destroyed the myth that binds America together, and for this he was driven from power."¹⁵

Included in the significant first generation of works on Nixon's dark doings are numerous accounts by journalists and others close to the day-to-day political machine; the most famous of these are the 1974 publication of Carl Bernstein and Bob Woodward's *All the President's Men* and *The Final Days*, released in 1976. Others, which struck a precarious balance between insider subjectivity and journalist objectivity, included William Safire's *Before the Fall: An Inside View of the Pre-Watergate White House*, published in 1975, and White House reporter J. Anthony Lukas's, *Nightmare: The Underside of the Nixon Years*, released in 1976. Woodward and Bernstein's books, although only a bit more removed (and also penned before the release of thousands of pages of textual files and hours of White House tapes) nonetheless represent a withering recounting of the fall of Richard Nixon.

Immediately following were the memoirs from Nixon's closest men, former administration officials, and those involved in the House and Senate committees investigating the Watergate break-in. The works came fast and furious. From 1976 to 1982, the pertinent memoirs include Charles Colson's *Born Again*; John Dean's *Blind Ambition: The White House Years*; Leon Jaworski's *The Right and the Power: The Prosecution of Watergate*; H. R. Haldeman's *The Ends of Power*; John Ehrlichman's *Witness to Power: The Nixon Years*; Sam Ervin's *The Whole Truth, the Watergate Conspiracy*; Jeb Magruder's *An American Life: One Man's Road to Watergate*, and, of course, Richard M. Nixon's own presidential memoir, *RN, The Memoirs of Richard Nixon*. The accounts from those who actually worked within the White House, while generally a mixture of self-serving evasions and nuanced finger pointing, are also fascinating glimpses into the inner workings of the Nixon administration and reveal a colorful cast of characters.

Within a decade, historians began to assess the Nixon presidency, but the focus and tenor of these works did not fundamentally stray from the journalistic and insider accounts. Interestingly, at the hands of the historians, Nixon's abuses of power and the Watergate affair gained even more focus and dominated the scholarship for much of the following decade. The next substantial round of books emerged as the first archival material became available. Historians and other scholars began to put events of the Nixon administration into a historical context. Among the first major series of political biographies on the president was Stanley Kutler's *The Wars of Watergate: The Last Crisis of Richard Nixon*, and Herbert Parmet's

¹⁴ Theodore H. White, *The Making of the President, 1972* (New York: Atheneum, 1974), 184-185, 195-199, 204-207. White chalks up the difference to the burgeoning Watergate issue visited with greater frequency in the pages of the *Washington Post*.

¹⁵ Theodore H. White, *Breach of Faith: The Fall of Richard Nixon* (New York: Dell Publishing Company: 1976), 409.

Richard Nixon and His America, both published in 1990, and Stephen Ambrose's *Nixon: The Triumph of a Politician, 1962-1972*, released in 1989.

In the initial historical works on the Nixon presidency, neutrality and objectivity were challenging propositions. Ambrose's second of three volumes on Nixon clarifies the difficulties scholars face in remaining detached from the history of the 37th president. Ambrose's *The Triumph of a Politician* is in many ways a masterwork of scholarship, covering ten fascinating years in the life of this seminal politician. The historian provides a rousing recounting of Nixon in office, his efforts to bring to an end the war in Vietnam, his political struggle to balance the political sensibilities for both the left and the right, the president's policy of "Vietnamization," normalizing the nation's relationship with Communist China, arms limitation talks, and détente with the Soviet Union. Ambrose commends the president for the breakthrough with China as well as his diplomatic efforts with Moscow.¹⁶ However, after describing Nixon's political career, including his first term in the White House and the reelection campaign in 1972, Ambrose concludes that Nixon remains outside his comprehension: "I confess that I do not understand this complex man."¹⁷ Ambrose admits that it is a struggle to assess Nixon given the amazing range of contradictions during his presidency; for example, his efforts at civil rights and progressive forays into foreign policy, contrasted with his vicious attempts to wipe out opponents by almost any means necessary. Despite his efforts, Ambrose is unable to get beyond these contradictions and the inevitable scandal in the Watergate hotel complex. What emerges above all in Ambrose's account is a White House riddled with corruption, and an administration that prolonged the Vietnam War for political reasons.¹⁸

As with other Nixon biographers, separating the good from the sin is problematic, and Ambrose leaves the reader questioning what history's judgment should be. At times, the historian appears as someone who admires the 37th president while serving as his harshest critic; Nixon is both "the ultimate realist" in foreign policy and "the ultimate cynic" in domestic policy. Those looking for satisfactory insight into seminal events such as the 1972 presidential election were left wanting. Ambrose's dilemma is one shared by other historians when confronting Richard Nixon; the challenge is to explain the enduring presence of this unsavory individual within the mainstream of American political history.¹⁹

Within a year of Ambrose's volume came the publication of two more Nixon biographies, each with dramatically different conclusions. Parmenter's *Richard Nixon and His America*, attempts to show Nixon in a favourable light (including depicting the president's commitment to "practical liberalism") while Kutler's *The Wars of Watergate*, published the same year, takes a much harsher stance on the 37th president, showing that Watergate revealed the core of Richard Nixon. Parmenter (who like Ambrose, is also a biographer of Dwight Eisenhower) attempts to distance his account from those who dwell (perhaps inordinately) on Nixon's shortcomings and not enough on what made the man a highly successful politician and public servant. Parmenter was one of the first historians able to draw upon archival and other primary sources, especially material unavailable to previous scholars—namely many of Nixon's personal papers. Adding to the author's level of access was that the former president also agreed to a

¹⁶ Stephen Ambrose, *The Triumph of a Politician, 1962-1972* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1990). For general arms control and relations with the Soviet Union, see pages 203, 225, 252, 288, 313-314, 441-444, 545-550; Vietnamization, 277-278, 306, 309, 324, 339, 388, 419-420, 426, 429, 461, 480, 505, 506, 627, 655; détente, 439-444, 526, and relations with China, 168, 287, 450, 453, 480, 513-519, 525-526.

¹⁷ Ambrose, *The Triumph of a Politician*, 10.

¹⁸ Ambrose, *The Triumph of a Politician*, 657.

¹⁹ See Ambrose, *The Triumph of a Politician*, 627-662.

series of interviews while granting access to former associates, family members, and friends.²⁰ Parmet wants to take Nixon at his word. The president's representation of "real Americans" or the nation's "silent majority" stemmed not from political cynicism but from a desire to help those who, like him, had come from modest backgrounds. Indeed, while historians have often portrayed Presidents Eisenhower and Kennedy as the archetypal postwar leaders, Parmet maintains that this applies just as much to Richard Nixon, as the nation actually looks much more like the man from Yorba Linda than a Dwight Eisenhower or a John Kennedy.²¹

Parmet's work is a generally persuasive reassessment of the Nixon years, especially when the author argues that Nixon has not received sufficient credit for keeping the Republican Party a relevant force in American political discourse and helping to rebuild it following Barry Goldwater's crushing defeat to Lyndon Johnson in 1964. Nixon, Parmet writes, was a representative figure of the new Republican Party. Furthermore, as Nixon exuded leadership in both foreign and domestic policy, he does not deserve the image of a psychologically impaired, ruthless partisan, but a centrist who considered the long-term future of the Republican Party. As such, this work represents more than a political biography but a study in the creation of a political culture that defines what the author refers to as the "Age of Nixon." The image of the president as an isolated and lonely administrator confined by the structure he created in the White House, however, remains intact.²²

While Parmet's book was a reassessment of Nixon's political career (with the benefit of a few years away from the drama of his resignation), Kutler's *The Wars of Watergate* represents one of the first attempts by a scholar to revisit Watergate (and challenge the president's memoirs and those of his men) from a historical perspective. While Parmet was given preferential treatment, including access to Nixon, his friends, and his associates, Kutler waged a long battle with Nixon and his estate over the release of the tapes. Kutler's battles with Nixon's lawyers over access to the historical record arguably contributed to his findings. Kutler makes it clear that Nixon, not his staff or even the plumbers, is the central figure in the Watergate scandal, as the break-in was "rooted in the lifelong political personality of Richard Nixon."²³

Kutler provides a good overview of Nixon's fascinating political career to trace what he calls a pattern that played out during the Watergate crisis and symbolized Nixon's "imperial presidency." The tapes, Kutler argues, reveal a paranoid, petty, and vengeful man. Far from a "third-rate burglary," it is a glimpse into severe abuses of power and obstructions of justice; we see a leader antagonistic with the media, contemptuous of Congress, and a micro-manager in the White House. What concerns the historian the most is Nixon apologists. Quoting Abraham Lincoln's reminder, "We cannot escape history," Kutler shudders at the thought that Nixon is worthy of rehabilitation. While he believes that the president should be remembered for his efforts in foreign policy, Kutler reminds us "no 'fair' history of the Nixon era can overlook the centrality of Watergate." While many of Nixon's achievements will get their just due, "they probably will not rival Watergate for historical attention." Because scholars such as Kutler are

²⁰ Parmet, *Richard Nixon and His America*, xi, xii. The author's interviews with the former president may help explain his more generous approach to Nixon despite the president's well documented abuses of his elected office. Parmet also interviewed longtime Nixon confidant, Bebe Rebozo and Nixon nemesis, Alger Hiss.

²¹ Parmet, *Richard Nixon and His America*, 442-443, 534-535, 540-541, 616, 620-646.

²² Parmet, *Richard Nixon and His America*, 620-646. Additionally, Parmet's work does not deal with the ramifications of this "Age of Nixon," and what this conclusion might say about his legions of supporters.

²³ Kutler, *The Wars of Watergate*, 617.

the only ones who can restore the lasting image of a fallen president, how we remember Nixon is largely dependent upon how historians and journalists choose to portray him in the scholarship.²⁴

The creation of this public memory has led to a number of insightful books on the Nixon presidency, including Louis Liebovich's *Richard Nixon, Watergate, and the Press*; Leon Friedman and William F. Levantrosser's *Watergate and Afterward: The Legacy of Richard M. Nixon*; Thomas Johnson's *The Rehabilitation of Richard Nixon: The Media's Effect on Collective Memory*, and Daniel Frick's *Reinventing Richard Nixon: A Cultural History of an American Obsession*. Notable among these is Michael Schudson's *Watergate in American Memory: How We Remember, Forget, and Reconstruct the Past*. Schudson, a sociologist from the University of California, released his work on the 20th anniversary of the break-in at Democratic National Committee headquarters at the Watergate complex. Schudson argues that what forced Nixon from office and how the public assumes it learned of the scandal is mostly a myth. The central fable is that it was 'reporting in search of the truth' that brought down a president. Other than the *Washington Post*, the press did very little in this regard until near the end of the crisis. Moreover, Woodward and Bernstein did little to dispel that myth, especially that journalists brought down the president in isolation. Schudson argues that the contribution by the journalistic profession was almost tangential to the work of Judge John Sirica, the Ervin Committee, or the discovery of the taping system inside the White House.²⁵ Another part of this myth is that the "liberal media" brought Nixon down as the *Post* went after the Democrats as hard as they did the Republicans. Never wanting to be "tools" for one party in an election campaign, *Post* Editor Ben Bradlee supported Woodward and Bernstein because he relished the chance to go after a good story. As Schudson suggests, that the Nixon administration's dark realities led to the president's demise, and not the actions of a liberal press or a right-wing conspiracy launched in reaction to Nixon's policy of détente with China and Russia and his disengagement in Vietnam, is not always satisfying. There is reluctance in some quarters to believe that the Watergate burglary and the contents of the tapes may define the Nixon presidency. Additionally, Nixon's administration was much more complex than the historical narrative allowed for in the first 20 years after his resignation. Indeed, Schudson accurately predicted an on-going re-imaging of Nixon. "Will Richard Nixon be rehabilitated? Or, perhaps more accurately, will he be rehabilitated again? One of the notable features of Nixon's career has been his rise from defeat and his refashioning of a public image of himself: the 'new Nixon' or the 'new new Nixon.' Could there be, after Watergate, yet another 'new Nixon'?"²⁶ Indeed, by the early 1990s, a rigorous reassessment of Nixon's place in history was well underway.

One of the more significant of these efforts was the 1994 release of Joan Hoff's *Nixon Reconsidered*. In this model revisionist account, Nixon actually emerges as one of the worst and one of the best presidents in the modern era. Watergate, she argues, has obscured the former president's considerable achievements in domestic policy. Among them was welfare reform, a national health insurance program, an expansion of affirmative action, a proposed guaranteed income, plans for national health insurance, revenue sharing, including redistributing power to

²⁴ Kutler, *The Wars of Watergate*, 612-621.

²⁵ Senator Sam Ervin (D) chaired the Senate Watergate Committee.

²⁶ Michael Schudson, *Watergate in American Memory: How We Remember, Forget, and Reconstruct the Past* (New York: Basic Books, 1993), 185. See also Louis Liebovich's *Richard Nixon, Watergate, and the Press: A Historical Respective* (Westport, CT: Praeger, 2003); Leon Friedman and William F. Levantrosser's *Watergate and Afterward: The Legacy of Richard M. Nixon* (Westport: Greenwood, 1992); Daniel Frick's *Reinventing Richard Nixon: A Cultural History of an American Obsession* (Lawrence, KS: University of Kansas Press, 2008), and Johnson's *The Rehabilitation of Richard Nixon*.

the local and state governments. Hoff maintains that these accomplishments actually “exceeded the accomplishments of the New Deal and the Great Society,” especially in “the areas of civil rights, social welfare spending, domestic international economic restructuring, urban parks, government reorganization, land-use initiatives, revenue sharing, draft reform, pension reform, and spending for the arts and humanities.”²⁷ Hoff devotes around 100 pages to Nixon’s efforts in foreign policy, initiatives that she argues were much less successful than his domestic endeavors.²⁸ While she gives Nixon and Henry Kissinger due recognition for establishing normalized relations with Communist China and détente with the Soviet Union, she gives the administration much less credit for its efforts in Vietnam and in the Third World. Ultimately, however, even the “lasting and positive results of his diplomacy faded more quickly than some aspects of his domestic policies” (which is the exact opposite of Kutler’s conclusion). Hoff’s monograph, to be true, is not an investigation of Nixon’s foreign policy, but a work that rises or falls on its consideration of the domestic front. In *Nixon Reconsidered*, the embattled and staunchly conservative president emerges as a closet liberal.²⁹

Those looking for more of a “balanced” approach found it five years later in Melvin Small’s *The Presidency of Richard Nixon*. For Richard Nixon, who once suggested that by 2000 historians would present his presidency in a more favorable light, the former president may have actually enjoyed some of Small’s highly readable account of his political life, but certainly not all of it. Small’s 1999 publication is part of the American Presidency Series by the University Press of Kansas, and has all the earmarks of that collection, with its measured approach. His work provides neither rehabilitation nor vilification. Like Hoff, Small details what he believes were many of Nixon’s significant domestic achievements while criticizing a great deal of his moves in foreign policy. Small’s work, again like Hoff’s, actually runs against more conventional wisdom, which held that Nixon’s administration was distinguished by its efforts in foreign affairs instead of in domestic accomplishment.³⁰ Scholars and pundits, argues Small, have failed to give the Nixon presidency the credit it deserves for its domestic agenda. The president presided over and initiated many progressive programs of lasting consequence, ones often overshadowed by the war in Vietnam. Among the progressive moves was the implementation of significant environmental legislation, including amendments to the Clean Air Act, the Endangered Species Act, and the National Environmental Policy Act. On environmental conservation, Small calls him the “the most environmentally conscious president since Theodore Roosevelt.”³¹ Other progressive social proposals included the floating of the Family Assistance Plan (FAP), which Small argues would have helped the nation’s working poor by creating national welfare standards, welfare reform, desegregating Southern schools, furthering women’s rights, as well as his expansion of federal funding for the arts and medical research.³² Indeed, the historian argues, Nixon ushered in the social programs launched in the Sixties, and spent more in his last year in office on social programs than Lyndon Johnson did in election year 1968. Small

²⁷ Hoff, *Nixon Reconsidered*, 49.

²⁸ This point is in contrast to many accounts that are more receptive to Nixon’s efforts in foreign affairs and less so on the domestic front.

²⁹ Hoff, *Nixon Reconsidered*, 77-144, 340-346. Not surprisingly, one of the endorsers of *Nixon Reconsidered* was Herbert Parmet, who credited Hoff for covering Nixon’s “much overlooked domestic initiatives.”

³⁰ Small, *The Presidency of Richard Nixon*, 55, 78, 95-99, 101-103, 106-108, 118-119, 121, 127-138, 140-142, 149, 150, 155, 307-309.

³¹ Small, *The Presidency of Richard Nixon*, 309. See also, 196-200.

³² Small, *The Presidency of Richard Nixon*, 153, 185-190, 192, 198-199, 308-311. Nixon’s proposals faced resistance from both congressional Republicans and Democrats.

does not ignore the crimes of Nixon, far from it, as he writes, “no president before or after ordered or participated in so many serious illegal and extralegal acts that violated constitutional principles,” a legacy that has poisoned many Americans’ relationship with their government for decades. Small does not completely emulate Hoff in her book’s attempt at rehabilitation. As he writes: “Historian Joan Hoff maintains that Watergate was the natural product of the political system as it existed in the seventies, ‘a disaster waiting to happen.’ Perhaps, but one wonders whether it would have happened the way it did on anyone else’s watch but Nixon’s.” While detailing Nixon’s accomplishments, the historian is unable to resurrect a fallen president. Small concludes that Nixon’s tenure was “among the most unusual, controversial, and tragic presidencies in American history. Indeed, his entire career could be described in those terms.”³³

Within a few years, though, more books appeared to provide a new look at this enigmatic historical figure, away from the immense historical weight of Watergate, and with an eye on the more “liberal” policies of Richard Nixon. One of the more provocative of these was the 2001 release of Dean Kotlowksi’s *Nixon’s Civil Rights*. While Nixon was never known as a champion of civil rights for African Americans and other minorities, Kotlowksi (a Hoff protégé) argues that this is because scholars have neglected the president’s domestic accomplishments. Indeed, Kotlowksi maintains that Nixon developed a credible record on civil rights.³⁴ Given the president’s hardwired public image as someone who had a scant record as an advocate for the nation’s racial minorities, and the reality of his narrow, if privately, held racial views and assumptions, Kotlowksi’s book assumes a surprising position. Given divisive issues such as school busing in the South, and Nixon’s fabled “Southern Strategy” (that included nominating conservatives George Harrold Carswell and Clement Haynsworth, Jr. to the Supreme Court), Kotlowksi’s work flies in the face of previous scholarship. It also challenges the portrayal of Nixon as a calculating politician, one who assumed a strong “law and order” stance with its racial undertones to help secure two election victories during a turbulent era.

Kotlowksi maintains that Nixon deserves more credit as historians should examine what Nixon did instead of what he said. *Nixon’s Civil Rights* is not “a means for rehabilitation,” Kotlowksi writes, clearly anticipating the label of Nixon apologist—one who unduly elevates the president’s successes while diminishing his shortcomings. His focus on Nixon’s specific accomplishments (sans a thorough discussion of the president’s general political record within the history of the civil rights struggle) leaves the historian’s account of civil rights ripe for attack.³⁵ Kotlowksi is undaunted by such constraints, and, for example, argues that the specter of Watergate has made it too easy to summarily set aside Nixon’s formidable domestic record. The historian outlines a list of initiatives, including providing aid for black colleges, desegregating public schools in the South, supporting tribal self-determination for Native Americans and bilingual education for Hispanics, establishing the Office of Minority Business Enterprise (OMBE), and expanding federal procurement from firms owned by blacks and Hispanics, while helping to create contract set-asides for minority-owned firms.³⁶ The historian argues that those policies reflected the president’s personal ideology and beliefs, and because of that, Nixon’s

³³ Small, *The Presidency of Richard Nixon*, 308-311. See also Hoff, *Nixon Reconsidered*, 329-346.

³⁴ See Kotlowksi, *Nixon’s Civil Rights*, 5, 8, 11, 14.

³⁵ Kotlowksi, *Nixon’s Civil Rights*, 16-187.

³⁶ Kotlowksi, *Nixon’s Civil Rights*, 41-43, 122-156.

stance on civil rights was of his own making, helping to ensure his reelection by attracting a significant plurality of voters. In the end, Nixon's policies had profound long-term benefits.³⁷

Whereas in *Nixon's Civil Rights*, it is Richard Nixon, not Bill Clinton, who appears as America's "first black president," syndicated columnist Richard Reeves's tome, *President Nixon: Alone in the White House*, released the same year as Kotlowksi's book, stands in stark contrast. Reeves's approach examines the Nixon White House "as it looked from the center." The author's narrative of events assumes a highly readable chronological format that spans from the president's first inaugural in 1969 to April of 1973 when the events of Watergate began to unravel his presidency. Reeves makes good use of archival sources including declassified documents, tapes and paper records, including Nixon's daily writings, and the Haldeman Diary. Noting Nixon's often quoted missive, "This would be an easy job if you didn't have to deal with people," the author sets the stage for much of his book. Reeves's Nixon is a loner, an introvert, a liar, a master manipulator, a man who trusted virtually no one. The author takes readers inside the doors of the White House, where the atmosphere was poisonous and dark. Reeves's thesis has the 37th president of the United States existing in seclusion, scribbling notes on long yellow reams of paper, charting his thoughts and orders for the following day, and dreaming of shaping the times in which he lived. Nixon fired off many of these daily writings to his loyal chief of staff Bob Haldeman who turned them into the countless action memorandums for the White House staff. Reeves, though, remolds Nixon's entire persona around these writings, and shows him as a man cut off from the world and ripe for Watergate.³⁸ But Reeves was not alone, as he is both the recipient and the promoter of this view, one borrowed from Woodward and Bernstein and Kutler and reinforced by Reeves and Elizabeth Drew.

In recent years, works on Nixon have managed to transcend not only the Watergate saga and the abuses of power but have managed to release Nixon from his lonely White House, focusing almost exclusively on the president's foreign policy. Notable are Margaret MacMillan's *Nixon and Mao: The Week That Changed the World*, published in 2006, and Robert Dallek's *Nixon and Kissinger: Partners in Power*, released in 2007. MacMillan revisits both the optics and the policy of Richard's Nixon's historic trip to China and his meetings with Mao Zedong in Beijing, while Dallek's *Nixon and Kissinger* provides a thorough analysis of the complex relationship between Richard Nixon and Henry Kissinger during their White House years. MacMillan scours communiqués, cables, archival documents, and oral histories to reconstruct that historic week, while Dallek utilizes 20,000 pages of transcribed Kissinger telephone conversations and previously unused Nixon audio files, Oval Office conversations, and documents from the National Archives to assess this complex foreign policy team. Dallek depicts two men surprisingly alike, both in terms of their thirst for unbridled power and feelings of intense insecurity. Even though they worked in an almost co-presidency in terms of international affairs, after Watergate (like others on the president's team) Nixon and Kissinger seldom crossed paths again. Both MacMillan and Dallek reveal the triumphs of the Nixon administration in the Far East, especially in China. These works reveal Nixon in full profile: he is overly ambitious

³⁷The author does admit, however, that throughout his presidency, Nixon had a Democratic Congress and a Supreme Court that was more liberal on matters of civil rights than faced by some later presidents, which might call into question the degree to which the president was forced into a more progressive stance. Please see Kotlowksi, *Nixon's Civil Rights*, 1-14, 85-93, 100, 122-123, 258.

³⁸ See Richard Reeves, *President Nixon*, 12-18. In sharp contrast to Hoff and Kotlowksi, Reeves argues that Nixon cared little for domestic issues, and his efforts were often half-hearted. See also Ralph De Toledano's *One Man Alone: Richard Nixon* (New York: Funk and Wagnalls, 1969); and Vamik Volkan, Norman Itkowitz, and Andrew Dod, *Richard Nixon: A Psychobiography* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1997).

and complex, but not the ultimate cynic or out of touch and walled off and alone in the White House.³⁹

Other current trends in historiography have tried to stretch the interpretive canvas for explaining Nixon and his times. Two important works along this line are David Greenberg's *Nixon's Shadow*, released in 2003, and Rick Perlstein's *Nixonland*, published in 2008. Greenberg provides an engaging foray into the various historical images of Richard Nixon, and quickly runs smack into the revisionists and what he believes is this school's erroneous view of Nixon as the last liberal president. Greenberg contends that scholars have overemphasized Nixon's domestic achievements and his breakthroughs in foreign policy, falling into the trap of comparing his efforts with subsequent administrations instead of within the context of his time in office. Hence, Greenberg agrees with Stanley Kutler's comment that "Historians must judge the past by the standards of that past, not their own." With this as a guide, Greenberg sets his sights on the multiple-era views of Richard Nixon delving into how each period viewed this enigmatic public figure. A California populist in the 1940s, an enemy and anti-communist "Tricky Dicky" of the 1950s liberal establishment, a warmonger to the counterculture of the 1960s, a hero to Middle America in the early 1970s, a villain and victim of Watergate, and finally, an improbable liberal. Throughout, Greenberg reminds us that efforts to capture the "real" Nixon will remain elusive, especially if historians categorically deny any part of the politician's complex composition. As the scholar suggests, "If history can help us to understand Nixon better, it will do so not by stripping away and discarding the many images of him that have proliferated over the years, but by gathering and assembling them into a strange, irregular mosaic."⁴⁰

In Rick Perlstein's *Nixonland*, a wide-ranging venture into the 1960s and the political world of Richard Nixon, the president is not so much elusive but *pervasive*. Here Nixon's presidency is the natural outgrowth of a turbulent decade, a political force that was emblematic of the entire era. In Perlstein's thesis, Nixon captured the negative energy of the 1960s and turned it into political victory. From the election of 1964, through to the Watts riots of 1965, to the fire on the streets in 1968, we see how Nixon capitalized on the cultural pressure points, and both presided over and contributed to a fracturing of a nation. What was born of that turbulent decade caused deep fault lines—divisions that remain with us to this day, between left and right, red states and blue states, rich and struggling. While David Greenberg's Nixon is enigmatic, Perlstein's Nixon is a dark knowable force representing fracture and division, an emblematic character who personified a chaotic decade.⁴¹

In the 2008 biography of the 37th president by Elizabeth Drew, however, Richard Nixon is put back in his "place." Drew's *Richard M. Nixon: The 37th President, 1969-1974* (part of the American Presidents Series) finds little new in the man from Yorba Linda, and seemingly, little that his public life can teach us about the past. Unlike Greenberg's enigma, though, Drew's Nixon is identifiable, and thus he is thrown back into the cage where Stanley Kutler wants him; unloved, alone, unworthy of mourning or deeper exploration beyond the centrality of Watergate. Like Kutler, Drew argues that the scandal makes it impossible to view the Nixon presidency any other way but through the administration's high crimes and misdemeanors. According to the longtime Nixon observer, even in his early politics, "...his tactics, while not unique or in some

³⁹ See Robert Dallek, *Nixon and Kissinger: Partners in Power* (New York: Harper Perennial, 2007), ix-xii, 613-629, and Margaret MacMillan, *Nixon and Mao: The Week That Changed the World* (Toronto: Viking Canada, 2006), 312-329.

⁴⁰ See Greenberg, *Nixon's Shadow*, xv-xxxii, 327, 331, 337.

⁴¹ See Perlstein, *Nixonland*, xi-xiii, 3-19, 720-748.

cases even original with him, were, for his times, at the outer edges of opportunism and savageness.” In sharp contrast to Dean Kotlowksi’s thesis, the president handled civil rights cynically, and pandered to his southern and blue-collar constituency. Nixon is revealed as the ultimate pragmatist in this book, but it is certainly the thinnest and shallowest definition of the word. An opportunist at best in both domestic and foreign policy, Richard Nixon was ultimately unworthy of the presidency.⁴²

What connects the scholarship of the last decade with the previous twenty-five years is that it manages to almost completely avoid the landslide election of 1972. The recent exception is Perlstein’s *Nixonland* where the reelection campaign at least serves as a notable conclusion to a decade of turmoil, rather than merely a footnote of the Watergate era. In Perlstein’s work, however, the election of 1972 does not smell so much like a Nixon victory as the toxic flush of a decade of turmoil, the result of deep divisions within the nation. Consequently, *Nixon’s Loyalists* will delve into Perlstein’s endgame, where the historian argues that the Nixon team simply and cynically capitalized on the chaos and division in the nation to win big at the polls. In contrast, this dissertation suggests that the Nixon majority was not an achievement based merely on the fruits of fear, division, and political cynicism—the beginning of a wide divide between “red” states and “blue” states—but the product of a president and an inner circle that connected with the broad middle spectrum of the American electorate, by appearing to understand exactly where this majority stood.

As such, *Nixon’s Loyalists* argues that the nation only appeared divided. Indeed, this dive into the deep end of Nixon scholarship will reveal a president and his team more representative of that middling majority, which defined much of the post-war era, than few perhaps would care to admit. It grapples with the reality of Parmenter’s “age of Nixon,” and that arguably even though Nixon’s faithful and longtime supporters knew that “distasteful” political malfeasance surely occurred throughout his career, they voted for him anyway. Watergate has made it convenient to forget that the majority of voting-age Americans wanted a Dick Nixon in ’72, and put this politician back in the White House with the second greatest margin of victory in the history of American presidential elections, exceeded only by Franklin Delano Roosevelt’s victory in 1936. Rather than rising from a divided and fractured nation, Nixon had captured a majority not unlike the one enjoyed by his former boss Dwight Eisenhower, and the one that Lyndon Johnson captured in 1964. While Middle Americans had split between parties in 1960, and again in 1968, when the Democratic Party imploded in Chicago over Vietnam, division among the majority was little more than skin deep, irritated by an agitated minority and magnified by the lens of television news: Black Power, hallucinated street theater, campus angst, and virgin idealists with fists. By the end of 1970, a year that saw both the Mayday student protests and a fiery and agitated Nixon on the midterm campaign trail, Americans wanted steadiness, not only in their nation but also in their president. Nixon’s men had finally gotten it. And long before November of 1972, the president and his loyal followers in the White House had reconstituted a Middle American consensus and a landslide of historic proportions.

It has been 34 years since journalist Theodore H. White published *The Making of the President, 1972*. Since then, the National Archives and Records Administration have released tens of thousands of documents and hundreds of hours of White House tapes, and staffers have penned voluminous diaries and memoirs. Revisiting this seminal election is long overdue. Along the way, we will see how the inscrutable Richard Nixon gains clarity in historical memory when he is revealed in all of his complexity: as an opportunist never without allies in periods of fear

⁴² Drew, *Richard M. Nixon*, 2, 9-12, 42-44, 47.

and uncertainty; as a politician never disconnected from the fighters and the partisans; and as a leader rarely out of step with the not so silent majority.

CHAPTER 1

“HOLY” WARRIORS

Missouri on a cold January morning. With the top of his Buick Wildcat convertible closed to the Midwestern sky, Patrick J. Buchanan left the heartland and headed east and home to Washington, D.C.. Packed floor to roof with personal papers, pots, pans—the accumulation of three and a half years of life in St. Louis—Buchanan drove his new wheels onto the interstate. Enjoying the speed and the feel of the open road, he headed east down Route 40 through Terre Haute and into the Indiana heartland, shifting south at Columbus, Ohio, down through Wheeling, West Virginia, and the homestretch into the capital to his parent’s large white house on Utah Avenue to tell them about his *rendezvous* with history. During the long trip, Buchanan’s mind filled with images of past and future. Cutting his teeth with the St. Louis *Globe-Democrat* as one of the youngest political editors in the country at age twenty-three, Buchanan first met the man he was leaving to join during a brief conversation at a reception. He told the man that he wanted to work for him one day.⁴³ It was 1966, and from across the nation, young ambitious men were beginning to answer the call to serve. A rumor no longer, their political hero had emerged from his “wilderness years” and was about to launch himself back onto the national stage. That fine and promising morning, leaving his job behind him, the twenty-six year-old journalist answered that call to service, and drove halfway across the country to work for the political comeback of Richard M. Nixon. For men like Buchanan, their loyalty had begun long *before* inauguration day.

They were “the best and the brightest,” celebrated journalist David Halberstam wrote of those called to Washington in January 1961 by newly elected John F. Kennedy. Men of eminence and accomplishment, the young president’s team were Ivy Leaguers, the elite of the nation’s corporate and academic establishment who brought to their lofty positions a combination of privilege, pedigree, and power. Then there were Richard Nixon’s men—those who loathed the establishment, resented its elites, scorned those of blue-blooded derivation, yet were rapt by positions of power and influence. Eager and ambitious, they were bound together by a “professional fascination” for the political game. They were also young. As veteran journalist Elizabeth Drew writes, the number of people under the age of 30 in the Nixon administration was “more than in all previous White House staffs combined.”⁴⁴ The chaser for their youthful passion was a proclivity for mistakes. Politically like-minded, Nixon’s men were certainly not alike. With diverse personalities, temperaments, and backgrounds, they included, “the visionary and the hard-knuckled, the mean and the gentle, the sweet and the bitter,” as presidential biographer Theodore White recalled. Young, independent, and new to power, they assumed the corridors of clout and command after Nixon’s narrow victory over Hubert Humphrey in 1968, a brash and inexperienced assemblage, fresh to Washington, and—other than the president—new to the nation.⁴⁵

⁴³ See Patrick J. Buchanan, *Right from the Beginning* (Washington: D.C.: Regnery Gateway, 1990) 294-323, and Julius Duscha’s article in the *New York Times*, August 20, 1972, 9, 92-93, 95, 97, 100.

⁴⁴ Drew, *President Nixon*, 31.

⁴⁵ White, *Breach of Faith*, 107.

Although “all the president’s men” have been covered in scholarship in many ways following Nixon’s resignation, this team has largely been viewed through the lens of Watergate or as the paranoid purveyors of dirty tricks, a retrospective that limits rather than expands on the administration’s highly evolved and motivated political inner circle.⁴⁶ This chapter provides a new look at the team in the context of the 1972 reelection bid—men still young and even more committed and fixated to get their boss reelected. The resulting internal tensions and rivalries helped shape what became one of the more fascinating and unique national election campaigns and reveals a volatile political animal.

Many of Nixon’s young and eager group could be tracked back to those Haldeman brought with him from his California-based J. Walter Thompson advertising team during the 1968 campaign. The significant step was that the president and Haldeman decided to bring those same individuals into the White House to govern the country. Among them were Dwight Chapin, Larry Higby, Ken Cole, Gordon Strachan, and Ron Ziegler, who joined with Nixon’s longtime cronies, Herb Klein, Murray Chotiner, Peter Flannigan, and a later but equally staunch ally, 1968 campaign director John Mitchell and Len Garment from his New York law firm days. They were an atypical assemblage picked to run an administration, and it had an effect on their approach to governance. Indeed, as Elizabeth Drew has pointed out, “The dominance of former campaign functionaries led Nixon’s White House to focus on politics and process rather than policy.” Moreover, some of this young staff “felt that the people around the president *were* the government.” The country’s leadership, as Theodore White fittingly suggested, “had fallen by the end of 1968 to a handful of men almost uneducated in American history, with little background in government or the American tradition of power.” Emerging from the chaos of the 1960s, they were “embittered by defeat and thrilled by victory,” coagulating into a team “managerial and able—but very, very tough.”⁴⁷

Arguably, the toughest of Nixon’s inner circle resided at the apex of the White House power pyramid, Harry Robbins (Bob) Haldeman. President Nixon’s chief of staff was in many ways fearless; with his dour expression, piercing eyes, rigid crew cut, and his fierce manner of dealing with underlings, he constituted an imposing figure in the corridors outside the Oval Office. A longtime Nixon loyalist, Haldeman served as an advance man dating back to the

⁴⁶ There is an exhaustive collection of books that deal primarily with Nixon’s team largely through its connection to scandal, abuses of power, dirty tricks and “rat-fucking,” a slang for political espionage. See, for example, Bob Woodward and Carl Bernstein’s *All the President’s Men* (New York, NY: Simon & Schuster, 1974); Anthony Summers and Robbyn Swan, *The Arrogance of Power: The Secret World of Richard Nixon* (New York, NY: Viking Press, 2000); Richard Reeves, *President Nixon: Alone in the White House* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2001); Fred J. Maroon, *The Nixon Years, 1969-1974: White House to Watergate* (New York, NY: Abbeville Press, 1999); J. Anthony Lukas, *Nightmare: The Underside of the Nixon Years* (New York, NY: Viking Press, 1976); Daniel Cohen, *Watergate: Deception in the White House* (Brookfield, CT: Millbrook Press, 1998); Richard K. Curtis, *Hubris and the Presidency: The Abuse of Power by Johnson and Nixon* (Danbury, CT: Rutledge Books, Inc., 2000); Fred Emery, *Watergate: The Corruption of American Politics and the Fall of Richard Nixon* (New York, NY: Times Books, 1994); Leon Friedman and William F. Levantrosser, eds. *Watergate and Afterward: The Legacy of Richard M. Nixon* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1992); Richard W. Hostrop, *Watergate: The Waterloo of a President* (Palm Springs, CA: ETC Publications, 1975); and Stanley Kutler’s *Watergate: The Fall of Richard Nixon* (Brandywine Press, 1996), and *The Wars of Watergate: The Last Crisis of Richard Nixon* (New York, NY: Knopf, 1990).

⁴⁷ White, *Breach of Faith*, 107, 147. As White pointed out, “The men Bob Haldeman packed into ‘operations and administration’ were very young and very new.” See also Drew, *Richard M. Nixon*, 30-33; Ehrlichman, *Witness to Power*, 24; and Magruder, *An American Life*, 6. Higby had begun working for Haldeman part time while attending UCLA.

politician's 1956 campaign for vice president under Dwight Eisenhower, and again during the 1960 presidential election, following the politician on through his failed bid for the governor's mansion in California. Haldeman joined the president's team for the successful '68 campaign and then as White House chief of staff. There is little doubt in anyone's mind that the former advertising executive was Nixon's closest and most trusted aide. The sentiment ran both ways. "It was a total commitment. A clear-cut case of hero worship, almost a wedding," recalled Franklin Murphy, then chancellor of the University of California. "The basic loyalty was to the man, not to the Republican Party, perhaps not even to the traditional processes of government."⁴⁸

Haldeman was a tireless worker for his boss, beginning with his arrival at the West Wing before 7:00 am and ending late into the night, as he jotted down an encapsulation of the day's events into his personal diary at home. Haldeman coordinated the top line of the president's activities, served as his chief adviser, and tried to protect his boss by controlling all access into the Oval Office. In the Nixon White House, the chief of staff's duties involved transforming the seemingly endless hand-written and typed presidential requests into daily action memorandums to staff throughout the administration. These in turn, generated hundreds more internal memos, responses and counter responses, strategies, insights, slights, rants, and drag-out arguments either copied widely or held administratively confidential or "eyes only." Haldeman's issuance of staff memos had become a fine bureaucratic art. The documents also reveal his confidence in communicating with staffers. His scrawled rebuttals in the margins of staff memos reveal no hesitation marks, no cross-outs. His penned replies were verbiage set in full bold pen strikes across the page. As Jeb Magruder remembered, "Haldeman had a fetish about memos."⁴⁹

Nixon's chief aide favored communicating with his staff via memos as it was easier and quicker to say no on matters he did not care to debate. Even the ubiquitous Charles Colson knew that it was easier to get ten minutes with the president than with Haldeman. "He could be charming when time permitted—but time did not often permit," recalled Magruder. Staff members, though, wanted good words from "H," reassurance that things were okay and their jobs were still safe. "He usually scribbled comments in the margin when he returned a memo to you, and we all awaited his comments like kids awaiting their report card." An "excellent" would make someone's week while a "No!" could make someone "despair." There are dozens of returned memos from nearly everyone on the White House staff with "No" underlined three times. As Magruder mused, "We rationalized that even if he cut you to pieces, at least that proved he was thinking about you."⁵⁰ At times Haldeman could be especially blunt. When aide Dwight Chapin tried to beg off a trip that he planned for the president to Canada, his boss fired back in a penned scrawl across Chapin's memo. "You are in charge of the trips and you damn well better be on them."⁵¹ When Pat Buchanan was unaware that the official slogan for 1972 had already been chosen as "President Nixon – Now More Than Ever," Haldeman shot back, "That's what it *is*—check your facts first."⁵² Aide Larry Higby quickly discovered that terse responses

⁴⁸ White, *Breach of Faith*, 125.

⁴⁹ Magruder, *An American Life*, 67-69. See also Joseph C. Spear, *The Presidents and the Press: The Nixon Legacy* (Cambridge, Mass: MIT Press, 1984), 70.

⁵⁰ Magruder, *An American Life*, 67.

⁵¹ Memorandum from Dwight Chapin to H.R. Haldeman, April 10, 1972, Haldeman Papers, Box 95, NARA.

⁵² Memorandum from Pat Buchanan to H.R. Haldeman, August 13, 1972, and Haldeman's handwritten response, Haldeman Papers, Box 101, NARA. Buchanan had unfortunately penned a memo to the powerful chief of staff enunciating the correct tone, but one that was out of the loop concerning the campaign slogan. As the speechwriter suggested, "By making our slogan 'Nixon-Now More Than Ever,' we focus upon the name which is quintessentially Republican, and lose the advantage of incumbency. Why not rather go for 'President Nixon – Now More Than Ever

from the chief of staff were a matter of course: caught in Haldeman's crosshairs, the unfortunate staffer was verbally chewed out for two solid minutes within earshot of the Oval Office. Haldeman aide Gordon Strachan (another protégé from California) learned to live life tied to a pager given to him by the chief of staff so he could never be away from contact, day or night. There was often no escape for those like Strachan even in bed as the loyal but weary aide discovered when he was woken in the middle of the night by a phone call from the White House. Through the handset, Haldeman "chewed him out royally" for an earlier "minor slip." The next morning Strachan concluded that the call had been a bad dream until the phone logs at the White House switchboard let him know that his boss had called his house at 3:00 am. Not unexpectedly, as J. Anthony Lukas pointed out, "Strachan was terrified of Haldeman."⁵³

Memos went into Haldeman's out basket and into the hands of Larry Higby who made sure the machinery of getting things done was moving forward. Indeed, in some ways Higby became for Haldeman what Haldeman was for the president. The young staffer became the stand-in for his boss at times because Nixon's chief of staff kept such a taxing schedule. It occurred to such an extent that some in the administration with matters to attend to were forced to go through Higby to see Haldeman. Even Senator Bob Dole complained that his calls to the president were re-routed to Haldeman's line only to "wind up talking to some kid named Higby." Staff knew, though, that if they were blocked by Higby it happened on Haldeman's orders. In the hallways of the White House, directives from "H" were heeded, as everyone in the inner circle knew that "An order from Haldeman was an order from the President." Haldeman was the heavy. "Every President needs a son of a bitch and I'm Nixon's . . . I get done what he wants done and I take the heat instead of him," Haldeman was quoted as saying by most of his aides, and essentially confirmed by the chief of staff in his memoirs.⁵⁴ Haldeman was always more than a bouncer or a buffer for the president, but a true believer perhaps without parallel in the White House. As Magruder suggested, "I never saw the slightest indication that Haldeman disagreed with anything that Nixon said or did . . . Haldeman was just as hard-line as Nixon. He hated Nixon's political enemies as much as Nixon hated them."⁵⁵

An aggressive stance against "political enemies" emanated from Haldeman out to his staff, especially men like Dwight Chapin. Born in Wichita, Kansas, Chapin moved with his family to California, went to USC, and another Haldeman protégé from his advertising agency days. While still in college, Chapin began his active political career working for Nixon's 1962 campaign, gaining Haldeman's notice. The bright and ambitious Chapin caught Nixon's eye, too, and served as his personal aide from 1967 through to the '68 campaign, gaining a reputation for fierce loyalty especially to Haldeman and the president. This allegiance was rewarded by his appointment as special assistant to the president from 1968-1971, and deputy assistant, serving as appointments secretary from 1971-1973. Chapin assumed responsibility for scheduling all presidential activities and appointments, overseeing the advance men for domestic and international events, and scheduling the president's trips abroad. One of the pivotal parts of his role was controlling the 25 phone lines in and out of the Oval Office and attending the early morning staff meetings run by Haldeman, taking notes on political strategy, media relations,

which surrounds the partisan term 'Nixon' with the aura of the Presidency." There is little doubt from the memo that he was pleased that he had sensed the issue so aptly.

⁵³ Lukas, *Nightmare*, 187.

⁵⁴ Haldeman, *Ends of Power*, 54.

⁵⁵ Magruder, *An American Life*, 67-69, 70, 127.

campaigning, and opinion polls. As the appointments secretary, Chapin was not only fiercely loyal to the president but a “political animal” with few rivals.⁵⁶

One man who could out ‘animal’ Chapin was Charles Wendell Colson. The president’s special counsel was perhaps the only one in the White House, other than the president, whom Haldeman was unable to intimidate or control. By 1972, the 41-year-old former U.S. Marine and special counsel for the president had arrived fully and completely on the scene, with a large staff and his fingers in all the president’s pies. As he walked down the halls in the White House or at his office next to the president’s own “hideaway” burrow at the end of the coveted King’s Row hallway in the Old Executive Office Building, dubbed so as only those with access to Nixon enjoyed such a placement, fingers pointed and heads nodded knowingly. Staffers whispered about the bullish Boston lawyer with his round face, stocky build, slicked black hair, and thick framed spectacles: there goes the “hatchet man,” that “cold bastard,” “Mr. Political Fix it,” the “chief of the dirty tricks department,” “a cobra,” and “an unguided missile.” Colson relished calling himself a “flag-waving, kick-‘em-in-the-nuts, anti-press, anti-liberal Nixon fanatic.” In his den at home, the president’s special counsel and political strategist proudly displayed the slogan, “When you have them by the balls their hearts and minds will follow.” Colson was a tireless worker, slugging often through 15-hour workdays. It was not uncommon to find him in his office on weekends, feet up on his desk; cajoling, pressuring people on the phone, hammering out memos.⁵⁷

Colson hailed from the protestant minority enclave in Boston, where raising oneself up by the bootstraps was not a cliché but a way of life. His father completed his law degree at night school while Colson was a child; his grandfather, an orphan, worked his way up and ended up playing with the Boston Symphony. The young Colson grew to embrace an early bitterness against the local establishment and contempt of the Beacon Hill and Harvard class who relied on familial connections instead of tenaciousness for success. Colson believed in self-reliance and thus, on principle, became the rare soul to turn down a full scholarship from Harvard. Nonetheless, he went to Brown, where he became involved in the Young Republicans, graduated with distinction, and joined the Marines. In 1959, after becoming the youngest administrative assistant on the Hill to Republican Senator Leverett Saltonstall, Colson attended Georgetown Law School at night, like his father. He practiced law in Boston, and from his wasp middle class background in Massachusetts, learned the nuance and importance of “ethnic-bloc politics.”⁵⁸

The special counsel first met Nixon when he served as vice president under Dwight Eisenhower, and suggested that the politician from California take another run for the White House in 1964. Known as someone loyal to a fault; by associates as “intensely loyal”; and by his father as “viciously loyal,” Colson became smitten with the Californian politician, admitting that Richard Nixon was the “brightest man I’ve ever known in my life. And the most dedicated person.” The man who relished his own reputation as “the chief ass kicker around the White House,” was naturally fearlessly loyal to Nixon and claimed on more than one occasion that he would do “anything Richard Nixon asks me to do—period.”⁵⁹ As Nixon recalled to his assistant

⁵⁶ See Lukas, *Nightmare*, 151-152, and Chapin’s profile and files in NARA. See also the White House telephone logs for calls to and from Chapin’s office through the White House switchboard. The logs for the reelection period may be found in John Dean’s papers, NARA.

⁵⁷ See the *Washington Post*, December 5, 1972, B1, B3. See also Charles Colson, *Born Again* (New York: Bantam Edition, 1977), 15-29, 35, 56-59; and Magruder, *An American Life*, 74-77.

⁵⁸ The *Washington Post*, December 5, 1972, B1, B3. See also Colson, *Born Again*, 15-29, 35, 56-59; Magruder, *An American Life*, 74-77; and White, *Breach of Faith*, 184-186.

⁵⁹ Leon Jaworski, *The Right and the Power*, 64. See also the *Washington Post*, December 5, 1972, B1, B3.

Monica Crowley years later, Colson was “loyal to the gut.”⁶⁰ The Boston born lawyer believed in getting the job done no matter what the costs. Massachusetts State Senator John Quinlan suggested that Colson was the type of individual who would stop just short of breaking the law, but if he did cross the line, someone else would take the fall: “He wouldn’t get caught at anything,” Quinlan quipped. “He’s too bright.”⁶¹ Watergate prosecutor Leon Jaworski noticed that although Colson appeared “amiable” and “charming,” his investigations suggested that the man was “utterly ruthless,” much more the “hatchet man” than a special counsel to the president of the United States. “Colson may have been a number of unattractive things, but stupid wasn’t one of them.”⁶²

Colson used his cunning and his aggressively ambitious nature to increase his influence around the seat of power. Coming aboard in November of 1969, the special counsel began to take on the “rough chores others wouldn’t do.” As Ehrlichman wrote in his memoir, “Before long Colson’s small staff was growing, and the frequency of Colson’s visits to the President was increasing.” The catalyst for Colson’s rise in 1971 was the president’s well-known desire to plug leaks in his administration after the release of the Pentagon Papers by Daniel Ellsberg. Colson’s rise to power in the White House had a considerable impact on the political realities inside the Oval Office and the reelection of 1972, beyond the well-known story of plumbers, dirty tricksters, and Watergate. Colson sensed an opportunity in 1971, knowing that, as Ehrlichman recalled, “Richard Nixon was frustrated.”⁶³ Haldeman’s deputy, Jeb Magruder, agreed, adding that in meetings, Colson would listen carefully to the direction the president was heading and then say what Nixon wanted to hear. “He could devastate those who disagreed with him. His tactic was always the same: he only wished to help the President, so if you disagreed with him, you must be disloyal to the President He would challenge anyone except Haldeman and Nixon, who were never wrong.” White House staffers like Magruder understood “that from 1970 on, [Colson] was the man whose advice the President most often followed on politics and on the media. He arrived in the White House with one secretary and by the time he left, he had dozens of people reporting to him.”⁶⁴ But while Colson smelled an opportunity to gain power and influence, less savory characters like E. Howard Hunt also saw the special counsel as a way into the White House. “Hunt had a nose for power,” J. Anthony Lukas wrote, “and he could smell it on Chuck Colson.”⁶⁵ Men like the inexperienced Jeb Magruder, blinded by his own access to power, proved to be no counterweight to the special counsel’s growing activities, and in retrospect, could only shake his head. “The rest of us would joke about Colson’s ever-expanding empire—the Department of Dirty Tricks, we called it—and about the fact that none of us knew exactly what Colson was up to. The joke would in time be on us.”⁶⁶

Colson indeed took advantage of the young staff, feeling that he was able to bully inexperienced and unsure personnel, while devastating others as he did with Herb Klein. While it is well known that John Mitchell loathed Colson, no one was strong enough to counterbalance his growing influence, especially since Haldeman generally agreed with what the president’s special counsel was up to. Though sometimes wary of the scope of Colson’s activities, the chief

⁶⁰ See Monica Crowley, *Nixon in Winter*, 292.

⁶¹ *The Washington Post*, December 5, 1972, B1, B3. See also, White, *Breach of Faith*, 184-186.

⁶² Jaworski, *The Right and The Power*, 187.

⁶³ Ehrlichman, *Witness to Power*, 21, 59, 87, 239.

⁶⁴ Magruder, *An American Life*, 76-77.

⁶⁵ Lukas, *Nightmare*, 78.

⁶⁶ Magruder, *An American Life*, 76-77.

of staff appeared to do nothing to stop his growing access to and influence on the president. In fact, Haldeman reserved his most positive responses in memos for Colson. Comments such as “Colson, you’re right—your route is so much better. Right on!” became surprisingly common compared to their almost complete absence in other White House memorandums from Nixon’s chief of staff. Over time, Colson benefited from a toxic mixture of positive reinforcement and not so benign neglect. It was all under the presumption that the team was helping Nixon; ethics were no more than an obstacle to achieving an end.⁶⁷

Such was the case for the thoughtful but woefully misguided Jeb Stuart Magruder who still in his early 30s fell into a form of hero worship that allowed him to plunge chin deep into a personal and professional disaster. Magruder began working for Richard Nixon as the Southern California coordinator for his 1968 campaign when he met Haldeman. The young man made a good impression on the former advertising executive who saw in him a bright, handsome, and articulate individual who might be able to help them in the White House. As usual, Haldeman knew that Nixon needed continuous help with public relations and his image “problem.” For Magruder, the opportunity to work for Nixon in the White House was not only a dream come true but represented an opportunity to change the world. Magruder entered all that was to come with his eyes wide open, as he recalled in his memoir, “because I believed that his essentially conservative political philosophy was what American needed....I believed in Richard Nixon.”⁶⁸

Like many other young staffers, Magruder’s first office was in the White House basement across from the mess, before he moved into the Old Executive Office Building next to Herb Klein in the Office of Communications, and just down from Colson’s office and the president’s “hideaway” lair. Public relations for the president was to be Magruder’s game, but as the young Haldeman aide understood well enough, Nixon “was not a lovable man and no public relations program was going to make him so.” One of the issues for Haldeman, though, was organizing and finding a way to deliver the president’s message to the American people without having the president over expose himself. The idea was to coordinate all of the different units in the White House that dealt with communications and the media, including the communications unit, Ziegler’s Press Office, and the speechwriters and consultants to develop a public relations program to take the Nixon view of the world directly to the heart of America. It was not long, however, before the young Magruder was pulled down into the vortex between the White House and the operations at the Committee to Reelect the President (CREEP), when he was named as the Deputy Campaign Manager under John Mitchell. Soon, he was over his head swimming with and against the various factions and the skullduggery that constituted the back-story of the Nixon administration from the middle of 1971 onwards.⁶⁹

Those who served at the pleasure of the president and fought in his name took their path through the White House in different ways. Strategists and speechwriters such as Ray Price, Bill Safire, and Pat Buchanan, while knee-deep in partisan politics, managed to avoid the poisonous cup that was passed around like whiskey at an Irish wake. These theorists and wordsmiths themselves also differed in personality and style. Their boss was keenly aware of these differences. “When he was at his most Presidential, Ray Price was the writer Nixon preferred,”

⁶⁷ See memorandum from Charles Colson to H.R. Haldeman, April 5, 1972, and Haldeman’s handwritten response, Haldeman Papers, Box 95, NARA. See also Lukas, *Nightmare*, 11. Despite Mitchell’s antipathy towards Colson, he appeared to do nothing to avoid accepting his recommendation that they should hire E. Howard Hunt as a consultant to the reelection team.

⁶⁸ Magruder, *An American Life*, 1-3, 5.

⁶⁹ Magruder, *An American Life*, 1-3, 5, 63, 107.

Safire recalled about his colleagues. “When he was at his most elemental, it was Pat Buchanan, for whom he also had a personal affection.”⁷⁰ That personal affection was a two-way street, as Buchanan was always a fierce Nixon champion and defender. The linguistic pit-bull of the operation, who graduated with honors from Georgetown in 1961 and earned a masters from Columbia University’s Graduate School of Journalism in 1962, began working for Nixon in 1966 as executive assistant and joined the White House staff immediately after the inauguration in January 1969. Nixon was a proud attendee to Buchanan’s wedding, posing for photos on the steps of church after the service with the bride and groom. One of Buchanan’s prized possessions was the glowing personal letter sent by the president on the first anniversary of their election victory in November of 1969. “On this first anniversary of our campaign victory last year, I am reminded once again of how much your active and very effective participation meant to our achievement of that victory,” Nixon wrote. “The time and effort you devoted, the encouragement you gave, the personal commitment you made, all contributed greatly to our success in a difficult, exciting and closely contested campaign.” No one was more personally devoted to the president and Buchanan wore his politics on his sleeve, moving about the White House with a wry smile, with an abundance of energy and enthusiasm for his job to represent his political hero.⁷¹

Such was not the case for John Ehrlichman, the president’s advisor for domestic affairs, who projected no devotion on his sleeve but a scowl on his face. Stern, dour, and humorless, Ehrlichman, shoulders hunched, could be seen stalking (often impatiently) the hallways outside the Oval Office squinting like he had bit down on a lemon. Ehrlichman never appeared to enjoy his job. The lawyer, who first met Nixon in 1959, was a friend of Haldeman from their college days at UCLA. He began working for Nixon’s 1960 campaign against John Kennedy as an advance man, and again during Nixon’s run for the governor’s office in California in 1962. Given that Haldeman, Ehrlichman, and others who served with Nixon in the White House were denied a pardon before the president left office during the Watergate crisis, rosy references concerning their time with Nixon in memoirs are understandably fleeting. However, no staff memoir from the inner circle (other than John Dean’s) comes close to the bitterness expressed in Ehrlichman’s screed. While it was almost common knowledge in the White House that Nixon could not hold his liquor, Ehrlichman was the only one that has suggested that Nixon showed any attraction to women other than his wife, Pat, writing that the intoxicated candidate clumsily hit on a young woman in a campaign hotel suite during the ’62 election. Ehrlichman also indicated that Nixon’s drinking led to an ultimatum: that he would not work for him in the future unless he got the booze under control. According to Ehrlichman, Nixon did not let him down when he joined the campaign team for the successful run for the White House in 1968. However, during the administration’s first term things began to change. While Ehrlichman and Haldeman always appeared close, the internal memoranda suggested that as time wore on, the relationship became strained, especially over the necessity to deal with the peculiar human dynamics within the White House staff. Contributing to the edgy situation was that while the president’s domestic adviser was increasingly sinking into the deep end of abuses of power, he appeared strangely out of the loop in matters of substance after the 1970-midterm elections; this was especially apparent in his lack of profile in the reelection effort. The fine points of domestic policy took less and less

⁷⁰ Safire, *Before the Fall*, 100.

⁷¹ See letter from the President to Patrick J. Buchanan, November 7, 1969, Buchanan Papers, Box 7, NARA. See also Office of the White House Press Secretary, Buchanan biography of February 12, 1972; Safire, *Before the Fall*, 100; and Buchanan, *Right from the Beginning*, 315-325.

of the president's time and attention and Nixon's requests for Ehrlichman for help on the political front increasingly went to others including Chuck Colson. After 1970, the game was winning and Ehrlichman appeared to be frozen out of the political game.⁷²

The person to blame was the other member of the supposed Berlin Wall, H.R. Haldeman. In Ehrlichman's mind, the White House chief of staff no longer properly distinguished himself from his boss. He believed that the reason was that his former college buddy no longer had a sense of self. As the senior domestic policy aide wrote, "By 1968 it was hard to tell where Richard Nixon left off and H.R. Haldeman began." What was worse was that the situation had led to Haldeman's failure to protect the president from his own worst instincts, including some of the more nefarious characters with access to the White House. As Ehrlichman observed, "Later, Richard Nixon was to find a new complementary personality in Charles Colson." And while similar relationships existed with Nixon and Kissinger in foreign policy, Ehrlichman insists that the Nixon-Colson pairing "was the least attractive of the Nixon partnerships." That partnership upset the hierarchical applecart, according to Nixon's domestic adviser. "On paper, Colson reported to Haldeman; in fact, Colson reported to the President. The Colson staff grew to twenty-three people, with Nixon's personal approval, while everyone else was under an injunction to make drastic staff cuts. As time passed, each of us—Kissinger, Shultz and I—found Colson operating in our substantive areas at the President's specific instructions."⁷³

Contributing to the tensions was John Mitchell's resignation as Attorney General to become the campaign manager at CREEP. Mitchell not only had less control over events in the Oval Office but appeared unable to stem a growing level of animosity between the White House and the campaign headquarters at 1701 Pennsylvania Avenue. Colson was not only trying but succeeding in gaining control of the political operations in the White House and at CREEP as well. Mitchell and Colson were always at odds. As journalist J. Anthony Lukas, who covered the administration closely during this period recalled, "The Colson faction and the Mitchell faction struggled on the brink of the chasm trying to nudge the other over the edge and scamper to safety."⁷⁴ Colson, though, was winning on every front because the president liked the edge his "hatchet man" offered. Ehrlichman was clearly unimpressed. His feelings colored the way he saw many of his duties as time wore on, matching his general glowering disposition. Most communications and policy meetings about how to attack the opposition, according to Ehrlichman, "were a waste of time." As a rule, the chief domestic adviser for the president of the United States stayed away. "Richard Nixon would ultimately decide what would and wouldn't be done...Nixon would listen to Colson and Haldeman—and less often one of us others—and then do what he wanted to do."⁷⁵

Ehrlichman's disposition—more hurt than indifference—appeared to emerge from someone who knew that he had little control over his place. At once a man of stature and

⁷² See Ehrlichman, *Witness to Power*, vii, 2-19, 59-62, 186-194. Hints behind the reason for this appear in Ehrlichman's memoir, where the domestic adviser suggested that the president—who could still not hold his liquor—ignored a resentful cabinet, and allowed his special counsel, Colson, to have undue influence in the White House. The frequency of contact on matters of political substance that the president gave to others, in contrast to Ehrlichman, is apparent in the phone and WHT transcript logs from the White House, Camp David, and the Old Executive Office Building, including the thousands of memorandums pertaining to planning for the president's reelection.

⁷³ Ehrlichman, *Witness to Power*, 59-60, 186-194.

⁷⁴ Lukas, *Nightmare*, 310.

⁷⁵ Ehrlichman, *Witness to Power*, 21, 59, 87, 239. What was central to almost all in this small group was a belief in the man, Richard Nixon; the exception, as time wore on, appeared to be Ehrlichman.

importance, his access did not appear to transfer to influence with the president, an issue that was always at play around the edges of the Oval Office; there was no end to the sniping, infighting, tension, and bitterness that contributed to the character of the campaign to come. Ehrlichman, as the tapes clearly reveal, was willing to do the dirty work.⁷⁶ Certainly anger, mistrust, and paranoia were things that Ehrlichman shared, if nothing else, with the rest of team, and it also helps explain why Nixon's inner circle remained small. Much of this paranoia was the result of Haldeman and the president's chronic concern for plugging leaks.⁷⁷

The chief target of Nixon's concern about leaks was Henry Kissinger, whom the president believed leaked to the media as a matter of routine. Even though Kissinger was instrumental and indispensable to Nixon in matters of foreign policy, the president always resented the attention that his national security adviser and later, secretary of state received, demonstrated in his anger over having to share the cover of *Time* Magazine with him in January of 1973. But in domestic policy, especially in the reelection effort, the Nixon tapes from the Oval Office, the White House telephone, the Old Executive Office Building, and at Camp David reveal that Kissinger was seldom in the room on domestic political matters and not trusted when he was there. When Kissinger left the Oval Office, the conversations make it clear that Kissinger, other than on discussions concerning Vietnam, China, or the Soviet Union, was held in either contempt or suspicion, and thus was seldom in the inner circle's loop; this was especially true in regards to the 1972 presidential election. As historian Robert Dallek has pointed out, to recapture the White House, Nixon felt the need to plug the leaks stemming from the "bureaucratic battling" over foreign policy in Southeast Asia. The upshot was that the president was not "sure he could control Henry." Nixon suggested to Haldeman that "maybe we've got to bite the bullet now and get him out. The problem is, if we don't, he'll be in the driver's seat during the campaign and we've got to remember that he did leak things to us in '68, and we've got to assume he's capable of doing the same to our opponents in '72."⁷⁸ Indeed, not only did Kissinger not have the keys, he was nowhere near the driver's seat. Haldeman's diary indicates how little contribution was made to the reelection campaign by Nixon's would be partner in power:

K [Kissinger] came in and the discussion covered some of the general thinking about Vietnam and the P's big peace plan for next year, which K later told me he does not favor. He thinks that any pullout next year would be a serious mistake because the adverse reaction to it could set in well before the '72 elections. He favors, instead, a continued winding down and then a pullout right at the fall of '72 so that if any bad results follow they will be too late to affect the election.⁷⁹

The nadir of this diplomatic missive nicely encapsulates Kissinger's gift to matters of substance during the president's campaign for reelection. It was not that the national security adviser did not have his uses, but as J. Anthony Lukas correctly pointed out, "In the Nixon White House, Henry Kissinger was an outsider."⁸⁰

⁷⁶ See White House Tapes, Conversation Number 525-1, June 17, 1971; 260-21, July 2, 1971; 540-9, July 20, 1971; and 276-4, September 10, 1971, NARA.

⁷⁷ For the president's conversations over plugging leaks, see WHT Conversation No. 525-1, June 17, 1971; 528-4, June 24, 1971; 260-21, July 2, 1971; 534-2, July 1, 1971; 534-5, July 1, 1971; 534-12, July 1, 1971; 535-4, July 2, 1971; and 773-17, September 8, 1972, NARA.

⁷⁸ See Dallek, *Nixon and Kissinger*, 356. On Nixon's mistrust of Kissinger, see pages 93, 142, 310-311, 402-402, 614; Ehrlichman, *Witness to Power*, 272-276; and Drew, *Richard M. Nixon*, 71, 77-78.

⁷⁹ Haldeman, *Haldeman Diaries*, 221.

⁸⁰ Lukas, *Nightmare*, 46. At Camp David, while the president took and placed few calls to Kissinger, he routinely and (other than Haldeman) to the practical exclusion of anyone else, conferred with aide Chuck Colson.

Leaks to members of media (at least those not done at the president's own behest) were a preoccupation for the White House and constitute a part of a long history of fencing with the press over Richard Nixon's storied career. The battles date back to his first political campaign against Gerry Voorhis for the Congressional seat in California in 1946 and continued on through his contentious race for the Senate in 1950. Nixon was angered with the sharp criticism he faced in the media for his heavy-handed tactics against Democratic rival for the Senate Helen Gahagan Douglas (although Douglas could hit back and did with a campaign flyer that proclaimed Nixon was the purveyor of the "Big Lie—Hitler invented it, Stalin perfected it, Nixon uses it"), linking his opponent to Communism. According to the Nixon campaign machine, Douglas was "pink right down to her underwear," and it was comments such as this that made him the national media's favorite target.⁸¹ Nixon came under fire numerous times as vice president under Dwight Eisenhower, including the "Fund Crisis" and the farcical "Checkers" affair, where Nixon skillfully used television to take his case directly to the people and built a faithful following in Middle America. This was especially true during his anti-communist crusade against civil servant Alger Hiss, a case that brought him more fame in the American heartland than animosity in the national press. Nixon became a master manipulator of the media. However, the idea that Nixon had actual "enemies" in the press was practically part of the vernacular by the time he failed in his bid to gain the governor's office in California in 1962. On election night, a bitter Nixon cemented this idea, proclaiming at an impromptu press conference that members of the media would not have "Nixon to kick around anymore."⁸²

Despite Richard Nixon's well-documented antipathy for individual members of the press and publications including the *Washington Post*, there is really little evidence to suggest that the media were ever out to get him, let alone had any significant negative effect on his political career or his popularity prior to the unraveling of Watergate in 1973 and 1974. Nixon not only had learned to use media controversies to his advantage but he also surrounded himself with those who came from marketing backgrounds with honed media skills. Longtime CBS journalist Dan Rather took notice of Haldeman's media savvy, musing that Nixon's chief of staff "thinks he knows more about my business than I do, and I'm inclined to think he's correct He came out of an advertising agency in Los Angeles. He's made a lifetime study of the techniques of manipulating my business."⁸³ And dealing with the media was a Haldeman specialty. The former advertising executive believed that the best way to deal with media was to understand it, to know how it thought, and to tap the power it had to create images in the public's mind. Not using the press to its full advantage could be more dangerous than a few unfriendly journalists. It is a point of view that helps explain why Nixon and Haldeman were inseparable in the White House. For Nixon, the potential power of the press, combined with his thin skin for media criticism made for a curious and mostly false enemy. Although as speechwriter Bill Safire recalled, "I must have heard Richard Nixon say 'the press is the enemy' a dozen times."⁸⁴

⁸¹ See MacMillan, *Nixon and Mao*, 15.

⁸² For further discussion of these issues, see Drew, *Richard M. Nixon*, 9-12, 15-16, 18-133; Perlstein, *Nixonland*, 26-28, 34-35, 38-41, 43, 49; and Tom Wicker, *One of Us*, 34-50, 70-79, 80-110, 160-161, 192-194.

⁸³ Spear, *The Presidents and the Press*, 44, 93. As the author points out, at least 50 staffers who followed Nixon into the White House in 1968 were from media backgrounds—ones who helped package and sell the candidate's message during the campaign.

⁸⁴ Safire, *Before the Fall*, 291. See also Spear, *The Presidents and the Press*, 40, and Magruder, *An American Life*, 63. While Magruder realized that there might have been a disproportionate number of liberals in the media, he also understood that there was no point debating the idea that the media were their enemies and they were out to get them with Haldeman and the president. As Safire indicated, Haldeman made it worse because his own hatred for the

The president's intention to remain behind the scenes for his reelection bid coupled with his peculiar antipathy for the media increased the level of pressure on the team to enhance its boss's image. Throughout the long march towards election night, Nixon's chief of staff was relentless on the issue that staffers needed to be vigilant to every detail that would come to bear on the president's image. Using the tools of the media, it was everyone's responsibility to make Nixon look good. Haldeman had no problems taking members of staff to task over this issue. Following a television interview with Dan Rather where the president appeared tired, with dark circles under his eyes, Haldeman was incredulous that his staff did not think that more could be done to correct his appearance. As a frustrated chief of staff wrote in a memo to staffers Bill Carruthers and Mark Goode, "I'm disappointed to find that both of you feel that camera direction, lighting, and general appearance was good." There was, Haldeman pointed out, "universal reaction that the President looked bad—that he had large bags under his eyes, that he looked older than he usually does, and that was a poor picture." Haldeman wanted fewer side angles and more head-on shots. "It seems to me that with lights, makeup, and camera angle, you may not totally eliminate the lines, but you can certainly reduce the effect of them." He insisted that the way to do it was to manipulate CBS' camera angle so it was not above eye level. "We have got to exercise more control and get the camera down where it belongs." Goode suggested that fill lighting would have destroyed the feel of the Oval Office during the interview. Haldeman again showed his frustration. "...that's too darned bad, we should just destroy the overall feel of the room because the important thing is to have the President look good, not to have people get a pleasing and artistic tour of the Oval Office."⁸⁵ A few months later, Haldeman complained about the same issue following a television spot where a shadow appeared on both sides of the president's head. Haldeman fired off another terse administratively confidential memo to Goode. "I thought we had a new lighting system, and I would like to know what the problem was that caused the shadow, why it wasn't caught ahead of time, and what you are doing to correct it."⁸⁶

Haldeman's concern was that the media would always *prefer* to make Nixon look bad, and thus, the staff had to do everything it could to mitigate the worst of the damage. The duels and battles that were to come with the press originated directly from the president's desk. In a memo to Haldeman, on April 30, 1972, Nixon wrote, "We need the kind of attack which will get to their vulnerable spot—their total support of ultra-liberal causes I cannot emphasize too strongly my feeling that much more than any single issue that we are going to emphasize, the discrediting of the press must be our major objective over the next few months."⁸⁷ As a result, Nixon's chief of staff was always cracking the whip on the press issue. Haldeman insisted that those on the White House staff needed to be media wary and savvy. This was especially true in regards to answering criticisms through the press. The man whom Haldeman wanted on this issue was Chuck Colson. "There is deep concern about the effectiveness of our program with regard to media bias," Haldeman warned Colson in a memorandum. "While we are doing a good job reacting to day-to-day attacks by the media, we need to be following a long-term strategy, looking toward election day." Haldeman reminded the special counsel that Nixon's priority was

media did not "help to restrain the President's natural inclination to overreact to press criticism." Please also see Drew, *Richard M. Nixon*, 36-37.

⁸⁵ Memorandum from H.R. Haldeman to Bill Carruthers and Mark Goode, cc: Dwight Chapin and John Ziegler, January 5, 1972, Haldeman Papers, Box 199, NARA.

⁸⁶ Memorandum from H.R. Haldeman to Mark Goode, cc: Dwight Chapin, March 17, 1972, Haldeman Papers, Box 199, NARA.

⁸⁷ Reeves, *Alone in the White House*, 471-472.

the media. “You will recall that the President spoke very strongly about the press bias at the beginning of the Administration. There were several former newsmen who, with all honesty, believed that he was overstating the case—people like Herb Klein, Ray Price, Bill Safire, et al. . . After three years, we know they were wrong and that he was right.”⁸⁸

Haldeman, much like the president, displayed an especially thin skin when faced with criticism in the press. This was particularly true when the delivery of those criticisms was skillful. As the chief of staff noted, “What really puts the frosting on the cake as far as his theory is concerned is the [Robert] Novak article. Here is a press man who is strongly anti-Nixon, but he lays it out in such an effective way that not even the softest-headed individual in our staff could possibly fail to get the message.” Despite this baseless charge against the journalist (the columns with partner Roland Evans were frequently supportive of the president and harshly critical of Democrats), to Haldeman there was a “media problem,” and it needed to be handled before Election Day. “Let us be very precise as to what our target is. It is the national television and press media, based in Washington, not the media in the country. We should separate those two, and, of course, separate out those few that [press secretary Ken] Ziegler has finally determined may not be against us among the national press corps.” Haldeman told Colson to attack the press in its “vulnerable spot,” which was their supposed complete support for “ultra-liberal causes” including what the chief of staff believed was a “deliberate distortion” of the line between reporting and editorializing. Haldeman laid out what the campaign was all about in plain terms to the special counsel to the president:

The purpose of our campaign should be two-fold. The primary purpose incidentally is not that of trying to influence the national media so that they are not as biased against us. We will have some effect on this, but as we get pushed to election day, they will go all out in a desperate attempt to defeat us. The primary purpose is to discredit the national media among their readers and viewers.⁸⁹

Haldeman suggested that the vice president could be used as a “big gun” when the time was right, followed by “responsible” members of the House and the Senate, including state governors. Haldeman instructed Colson to get Ziegler, Klein, [Kenneth] Moore, [John] Scali, and Price onboard and implement a plan, with one member of the staff doing “nothing else but attain this objective.”⁹⁰

In his nightly diary, Haldeman noted that the president believed that tactical warfare was the only way to deal with unfriendly journalists, while using friendly members of the media to go after their opponents for them. “The only way we can fight the whole press problem . . . is through the Colson operation, the nutcutters, forcing our news and in a brutal vicious attack on the opposition.”⁹¹ The “nutcutters” tracked down into the sub-campaign of the 1972 election. Although it had no measurable benefit at the ballot boxes that November, it would end up characterizing the campaign in the public mind after Watergate.⁹² This darker and often more bizarre part of the election of 1972 was shaped in large measure by Charles Colson’s growing operations at the White House and at the campaign headquarters at 1701 Pennsylvania Avenue.

⁸⁸ Memorandum from H.R. Haldeman to Charles Colson, May 1, 1972, Haldeman Papers, Box 199, NARA.

⁸⁹ Memorandum from H.R. Haldeman to Charles Colson, May 1, 1972, Haldeman Papers, Box 199, NARA. Interesting in this criticism of journalist Bob Novak as being hard on Nixon is that he and his counterpart Roland Evans laid withering attacks on rival George McGovern throughout the campaign.

⁹⁰ Memorandum from H.R. Haldeman to Charles Colson, May 1, 1972, Haldeman Papers, Box 199, NARA.

⁹¹ Haldeman, *Haldeman Diaries*, 443.

⁹² See Woodward and Bernstein, *All the President’s Men*, 112-130, 135-158, 201-204, 218-219, 245, 251-253.

The Committee to Reelect the President had been raising campaign funds for the 1972 presidential election in its office a block from the White House since March 1971. By May of that year, it was a “take no prisoners” hive of activity that over the following six months planned the budgets for most of its programs; directors were appointed, staff was hired, and all activities became operational. The character of that organization was shaped by a motley and ultimately dangerous cast of characters. These included former FBI agent G. Gordon Liddy, Nixon crony and ex-New York City detective Jack Caulfield, and Caulfield buddy and former CIA and FBI agent James McCord, who oversaw a litany of spies and moles that began to dig up dirt on Democratic leaders and those vying for the top of the Democratic ticket in 1972. Rounding out this interesting assemblage was CREEP’s campaign manager John Mitchell, deputy director Jeb Magruder, and deputy finance chairman Herbert Kalmbach, who was also the president’s personal attorney. The goals were numerous. They included gaining intelligence on Democratic Party candidates (including Nixon nemesis and chairman of the Democratic National Committee, Larry O’Brien), launching a series of nefarious schemes to unleash like grenades along the campaign trail, and to eventually disrupt and subvert possible demonstrations at the Republican National Convention that August.⁹³

The collection of these unsavory characters in CREEP did not arrive together by accident and they tracked in and out of the White House, especially those whom Chuck Colson brought into the Old Executive Office Building and White House, mere feet away from the Oval Office, including former CIA contract officer E. Howard Hunt.⁹⁴ Haldeman’s California boys in the White House enlisted their own college cronies including University of Southern California alum and Chapin and Strachan friend Donald Segretti. Both the crown prince of the dirty tricks and the mascot of “rat fucking,” Segretti got the start up money for his enterprise through Chapin in June 1971, and cooked up a stew of crude, sophomoric efforts to disrupt the Democratic campaign events right through to the convention. This would include operatives canceling Democratic meetings and events, fabricating stories, creating fake letters on forged Democratic Party letterhead, and printing and distributing phony leaflets. The underbelly of the emerging campaign was frenetic, a litany of skullduggery hatched and run out of both 1701 and the White House. These included several months of 24-hour a day surveillance of Senator Edward Kennedy and the burglary in California of the office of Daniel Ellsberg’s psychiatrist. The type of schemes that actually got a voice in the shadow of the seat of supreme power within the United States are staggering in their recklessness, including Liddy’s “Operation Gemstone,” and others brewed under the guidance of the omnipresent Colson. The plots included sabotage, blackmail with the use of prostitutes, wiretapping, electronic surveillance, and a plan to kidnap Jerry Rubin and Abbie Hoffman and hold them in a safe house in Mexico so they would not disrupt the Republican National Convention. Although few took Liddy’s wild espionage schemes seriously, that someone of his background and character was allowed to operate at all with the knowledge and support of the attorney general and the president’s own chief of staff indicates how poisonous the underbelly of the campaign really was.⁹⁵ On a rainy afternoon in March 1971, as

⁹³ See J. Anthony Lukas, *Nightmare*, 153-168; Woodward and Bernstein, *All the President’s Men*, 112-130, 135-158, 201-204, 218-219, 245, 251-253.

⁹⁴ Colson told Nixon that Hunt was a “first-rate analyst,” and that the White House should “thank God” that men like him were on their side. See the Oval Office tape transcript from August 12, 1971, in Kutler’s *Abuse of Power*, 27.

⁹⁵ Lukas, *Nightmare*, 170-177. See also Perlstein, *Nixonland*, 388, 571-572, 580, 584, 593-594, 636-37, 666, 676, 679; and Magruder, *An American Life*, 171-199.

Magruder and Strachan walked back to 1701 from the White House, Strachan summed up the situation in a succinct but frightening manner: “Liddy’s a Hitler, but at least he’s our Hitler.”⁹⁶

Whereas presidential biographer Theodore White called Liddy a “gun-loving psychotic,” to Ehrlichman aide Egil (Bud) Krogh Jr., Liddy was a man of strength and worthy of admiration. A man like Liddy fit with Krogh’s political temperament, as he once boasted, “Anyone who opposes us, we’ll destroy. As a matter of fact, anyone who doesn’t support us, we’ll destroy.” Krogh, who worked most closely with Magruder, was relentless; lean and fit, he could be seen jogging in the mall, weightlifting in the White House exercise room, and working all night to finish a project.⁹⁷ In 1971, Krogh, along with Kissinger assistant David Young, was shoulder tapped to plug the leaks that the president wanted plugged. Krogh enlisted Liddy and Colson got Hunt. The former CIA operative developed a plan to go after Ellsberg and Ehrlichman approved the covert operation to get his psychiatrist’s files. But it quickly got worse, as Chuck Colson began pressing to use Liddy and others to get something they could use on DNC chair Lawrence O’Brien and enlisted Hunt to engage in intelligence gathering for CREEP.⁹⁸ The special counsel to the president was often directly involved in carrying out ground-level stunts, such as setting up a series of misleading advertising that linked Democratic senators campaigning for reelection in 1970 with abandoning prisoners of war, calling for an immediate surrender in Vietnam, and legalizing heroin.⁹⁹ All these were in step with a familiar, dark, and ruthless cadence that emanated from inside the Oval Office to a loyal group of subordinates. Nixon’s hand was directly involved in many of these activities and it was clear that it was what he expected to see during the march towards election night. As Haldeman recalled in his memoirs, the president “has several plots he wants hatched.”¹⁰⁰

As spring turned to summer 1971, this well-known and heavily disseminated story concerning the cast of characters occupying the offices on both sides of Pennsylvania Avenue reveals the edgy and largely unnecessary (in terms of political and electoral value) backdrop to the actual campaign. However, the impact on the staff caught up in-between the shenanigans and the growing power struggle and bickering among those at CREEP and the White House was not only significant, but is less well known, especially in relationship to the reelection effort. It should not surprise that staff relations were often tense. This strain intensified over growing struggles between the White House election team and CREEP’s operations at 1701, highlighting the upheaval during the ‘72 campaign.

Not surprisingly, John Ehrlichman was often on both the giving and the receiving end of criticism and browbeating when it came to the operations at 1701. While Haldeman himself was at times wary of some of the sloppiness in the CREEP operation, he was concerned with the effect of bickering on morale. On more than one occasion, Haldeman did his best to rein in Ehrlichman over feuds with CREEP and John Mitchell’s campaign staff. “I was quite disturbed with the results of the meeting we had in my office awhile back with John Mitchell, Fred Malek, and Ken Cole,” Haldeman wrote in a memo to Ehrlichman. “You will recall that at that meeting, you took a totally negative position and quite severely criticized Mitchell directly, as well as laying some strenuous objections and obstructions in the way of the development of Malek’s campaign role.” Haldeman believed that Mitchell’s efforts to develop a role for Malek and other

⁹⁶ Magruder, *An American Life*, 227.

⁹⁷ Magruder, *An American Life*, 79; Lukas, *Nightmare*, 203.

⁹⁸ Jaworski, *The Right and the Power*, 36-39; Magruder, *An American Life*, 213-214, 230-233.

⁹⁹ See Tom Braden’s Column in the *Washington Post*, July 28, 1972, A15.

¹⁰⁰ Haldeman, *Haldeman Diaries*, 193.

staffers were “honest and sincere” and that everyone including the president’s chief domestic adviser should deal with these internal matters in a “constructive” manner and “do everything we can to make it succeed, rather than simply to criticize it.” He was more concerned about the way Ehrlichman went after the Committee, especially after Magruder, which Haldeman thought was “disturbing.” Haldeman knew full well that much of the direction over at CREEP originated and was run increasingly out of the White House operations run by Ken Cole and Colson, and that he needed to understand it in that context. “The Committee’s material on issues may, indeed, be terrible. But, we ought to at least consider the possibility that that’s a reflection of the input they’ve been given from those better able to outline the issues and our positions on them.” Haldeman warned that they could easily descend into the “old ‘we-they’ situation.” The chief of staff wanted to impress on Ehrlichman for election year that it was “imperative that we all consider ourselves part of the Committee for the Re-Election of the President and not consider it as a separate entity which is in some way, an enemy of the White House.” There were numerous arguments over advertisements, posters, communications, mail outs, letters, and the preparation of materials. While Haldeman believed that many of the problems in isolation might have seemed “petty and minor” given Ehrlichman’s increasing frustration, they were systematic of deeper problems between “you and the Domestic Council vs. Mitchell and the Re-Election Committee.”¹⁰¹

Ehrlichman defended himself, insinuating that the charges emanating from CREEP that he unduly criticized Mitchell and “obstructed” and “undercut” Malek and Magruder were false. He denied saying that Magruder planned meetings poorly or suggested that the Committee’s advertising “stinks.” And charges that he cared for no one’s opinion except his own were “Not true.” Claims, however, that he had deliberately slowed the production of the “Speaker’s manual” were indeed correct, as Ehrlichman scrawled to Haldeman, “Right—because it was a total disaster.” He vehemently denied, though, that he had ordered a review of all of Committee’s campaign material. As Ehrlichman penned to Haldeman, “Absolutely not true in any respect.” But Ehrlichman was certainly critical. In a February 23 memo to Mitchell, he not only suggested that White House staff and the Committee for the Re-election were “meshing up very badly on matters of substantive policy” but that some of the work by CREEP staff, including Magruder, “to be very generous about it, it was very terrible.” Making it worse was that Ehrlichman copied this memo to Magruder. The young deputy campaign manager replied to the copied memo, writing, “It was very thoughtful of you to give me the memorandum you had addressed to the Attorney General relating to some of the problems you felt had been developing.” Magruder, who undoubtedly did not feel it was *thoughtful* at all, tried to clarify some of the issues and assuage the situation somewhat. Everyone wanted Ehrlichman to back off and Haldeman heard about it from all sides. Five days after Haldeman’s cautionary memo to Ehrlichman, internal staff memos showed worry and uncertainty about the matter. Higby fired off a memo to Strachan about the ramifications of this high profile row. “When we take on Ehrlichman, we are naturally getting into a serious and very delicate area. John has talked to Bob about the problems that Bob mentioned in his memo to John, and Bob, in turn, has talked to me. Bob made the point that John vigorously denied several of the charges.” Higby suggested that they were then unsure whom to believe, and that Magruder may not have been completely candid about Ehrlichman’s charge that

¹⁰¹ Memorandum from H.R. Haldeman to John Ehrlichman, March 17, 1972, Haldeman Papers, Box 199, NARA. Haldeman also found the time (when not brokering peace between the White House and 1701) to help arrange private viewings of *Dirty Harry* and the *French Connection* for the president at Camp David. See memorandum from H.R. Haldeman to Alexander Butterfield, March 7, 1972, Haldeman Papers, Box 199, NARA.

the advertising “stinks.” Haldeman wanted Higby to stress upon Strachan that he needed “the truth—the whole truth.” Higby summed up the entire episode in a way that helps to explain some of the internal dynamics between the White House and CREEP and the divided loyalties and agendas. “I think that we were probably sucked in, to some extent, by Magruder on this thing, although, I am sure that there really is a problem. Ehrlichman’s point in creating the problem is to draw it to a head so there are some substantial changes...The point is, I don’t think we have provided with Bob, all the facts and all aspects of all the facts before proceeding.”¹⁰²

Young staff, strong personalities, and infighting were not uncommon, and while the president supposedly had his fingers in every facet of the operation—the ultimate micromanager—he was not micromanaging any of this White House bickering. As former Nixon staffer Richard J. Whalen recalled, “Nixon did not much care what his subordinates did to each other as long as he was spared the sight of blood.”¹⁰³ Heading into the election year, the call for order, unity, and loyalty came from Haldeman’s office. The chief of staff knew that he was sitting on a powder keg, and if it were to explode, he wanted it to be on enemy territory. The challenge was to channel the energy outward. The requirement from the chief of staff was that everyone needed to work as one to get the president reelected in November 1972. What the team needed was passion and to find a way to engage the American people emotionally. As Haldeman suggested to the president in 1972, “...it’s clear that first we are better off today than we were a year ago, but secondly, there is a real need to establish the President’s identity as something other than just a professional President.” The chief of staff believed it was “necessary to crystallize the support to get people willing to get out and fight—to tie people to you emotionally—the country needs emotional feelings regarding the President. . . before they were fired up for the wrong causes, now they can be stirred up for the right cause.”¹⁰⁴

Haldeman and the president both knew well enough that directing the nation’s political passions was a tricky endeavor. Indeed, Richard Nixon and his loyal men had learned some hard lessons since assuming office in the winter of 1969. During his inaugural address, the newly sworn 37th President of the United States had called upon Americans to “lower” their voice and put an end to the era’s divisive rhetoric. “We cannot learn from one another until we stop shouting at one another, until we speak quietly enough so that our words can be heard as well as our voices,” Nixon said.¹⁰⁵ But that was then, and by the end of 1970, the president and his White House loyalists had strayed far from the lofty rhetoric of that promising January day in the nation’s capital, when everything was still before them and everything was still possible.

¹⁰² Confidential Eyes Only memorandum from Lawrence Higby to Gordon Strachan, March 21, 1972; Handwritten notes from Ehrlichman to Haldeman, March 18, 1972; Ehrlichman to Mitchell, February 23, 1972; Magruder to Ehrlichman, March 3, 1972, all found in WHSF, Contested Files, Box 30, Nixon Library.

¹⁰³ See Whalen’s article in the *Washington Post*, May 7, 1972, PO11, 12, 25, 30, 35, 41, 59.

¹⁰⁴ Haldeman notes to the President, January 20, 1972, Haldeman Papers, Box 153, NARA. According to former Nixon staffer Richard J. Whalen, Nixon wanted others to know that his staff had “brains. They have high intellectual quality, character and courage. They’re not for sale. These are guys that money can’t buy.” See the *Washington Post*, May 7, 1972, PO11, 12, 25, 30, 35, 41, 59.

¹⁰⁵ See the *Washington Post*, January 20, 1969, A1, A8.

CHAPTER 2

HEARTLAND HOMILIES

For almost 200 years, the policy of this nation has been made under our Constitution by those leaders in the Congress and the White House elected by all of the people. If a vocal minority, however fervent its cause, prevails over reason and the will of the majority, this nation has no future as a free society . . . And so tonight -- to you, the great silent majority of my fellow Americans -- I ask for your support.¹⁰⁶

Richard Nixon's presidency was wrought from the ashes of 1968, the tenuous victory for a minority party that compensated for its lack of a mandate with a single-minded quest for survival. The crier of law and order did not staunch the violence and turmoil that plagued election year. For the first two years of the Nixon administration, bombs exploded like pockets of rage from the Pentagon to Oakland, California. From Berkeley to Columbia, students hit the streets instead of books, hounding the establishment, its accouterments, and even the president's daughter, who faced enmity on her own campus and jeering outside the White House gates on her wedding day. As the self-appointed people's warriors raged against the war machine, the political machine inside the Nixon White House raged back. By the spring of 1970, the clash had reached a bloody climax at Kent State University, chased by a renewed swell of student insurrection. Nixon entered the mid-term elections a few months later in a fighter's stance. It was not a winning strategy. Election Day was a bitter disappointment as the Republican Party failed to make significant gains in the House or the Senate and the administration suffered a subsequent drop in the polls in 1971. The setbacks, however, triggered the president's consummate political instinct. Nixon and his men had an epiphany, a clear and quite sober understanding that the great majority of Middle Americans would back the president on the Vietnam War, would stand with him against the counterculture and the protesting students, would cheer him on the campaign trail and support him with their votes in the election booth. All Nixon needed to do was stop shouting, stop scaring an already fearful populace, and act as if he belonged where he was, something that was always a tricky proposition for the man from Yorba Linda.¹⁰⁷

Following recommendations from his advisers, the president changed his stance. Gone was the fighting armor, and in its place was a White House that spoke a language that did not require translation by those in the vast American heartland. Wrapped in a sheath of hearth qualities, Nixon and his team spoke plainly to "real Americans," or to those the president had earlier identified as ". . . the forgotten Americans—the non shouters, the non demonstrators."¹⁰⁸ Those "Middle Americans" were also the ones who put Dick Nixon back in the White House. While always a part of the Nixon mantra, this angle was dusted off and assumed a new importance and urgency midway through his first term in office, and it helped define the reelection effort in 1972.

¹⁰⁶ From Nixon's "silent majority" speech, November 3, 1969, Public Papers of the President, Nixon Library.

¹⁰⁷ See Richard Nixon, *RN, The Memoirs of Richard Nixon* (New York: Grosset & Dunlap, 1978), 455-466, 475 for the president's conflicted thoughts on this chaotic period of his presidency. For a look at the intense upheaval of this era, see Todd Gitlin, *The Sixties: Years of Hope, Days of Rage* (New York: Bantam Books, Revised Edition, 1993), 399-419; Theodore H. White, *Breach of Faith: The Fall of Richard Nixon* (New York: A Dell Book, 1976), 167-169, and James Rosen, *The Strong Man: John Mitchell and the Secrets of Watergate* (New York: Doubleday, 2008), 77-114.

¹⁰⁸ The quotation comes from Richard Nixon's acceptance speech and the 1968 Republican National Convention.

This chapter delves into the origins of that political footing, an emerging strategy after 1970 that aimed to recast the Republican Party as the one that stood for ordinary Americans while convincing the electorate that the Democratic Party only represented the elite, a party overtaken by “radicals and the extremists.” This change in strategy following the mid-term elections by the Nixon team has not been the focus of scholarly works, although evidence for it is found in White House staff memoirs, including the diaries of Nixon’s Chief of Staff H.R. Haldeman, and in hundreds of documents left behind by administration officials available in the National Archives. While the general story of Nixon’s attempt to build a new coalition carved from traditional Democratic blocs is fairly well known, little scholarship connects this to the Nixon team’s larger political strategy in the 1972 reelection bid.¹⁰⁹ This includes the effort to both divide the Democrats by commandeering elements of their traditional coalition and portraying the party as elitists, out of touch with Middle Americans. This chapter also traces the new approach put forth by Nixon’s political advisers, that victory in 1972 meant a departure from the past and that their boss needed to abandon his “Nixon the fighter” stance and leave his team to take the battle to the other side. The emergence of these strategies is the focus of this chapter.

It was not the first time the president did not look good on television. Those on Nixon’s team who snapped off their televisions in disgust on the night of Monday, November 2, 1970, could shift in their chairs and hearken back to 1960 when a young John F. Kennedy appeared to best their boss in front of a national audience in the first televised debate of that election year. They all remembered what happened that November, as Kennedy slipped past Richard Nixon, which at that point was the narrowest presidential election victory in the history of the Republic. On the night before the 1970 mid-term elections, Nixon appeared on television to deliver an address taped two days prior in Phoenix, Arizona, penned by speechwriter Bill Safire. The speech came on the heels of several recent confrontations between the antiwar movement and police, including growing violence and protests on the road in the last days of the campaign. The worst episode came in San Jose, California, where demonstrators tried to force their way into the venue and pelted the presidential motorcade on the way out with rocks and bricks, prompting the city’s chief of police, J. Raymond Blackmore, to declare that only “an act of God” saved the president. Following the event, Haldeman recorded in his diary that protestors “really hit the motorcade on the way out.” Nixon watched as a rock narrowly missed his head as he stepped into the waiting limo. The violence, however, was exactly what the president and his men wanted in front of the waiting media. “We wanted some confrontation,” Haldeman wrote, “and there were no hecklers in the hall, so we stalled departure a little bit so they could zero in outside, and they sure did.” On the way out, Nixon deliberately riled the crowd to elicit a violent response. “Before getting in car, P stood up and gave the V signs, which made them mad,” Haldeman recalled that evening. “They threw rocks, flags, candles, etc., as we drove out.” With rocks smashing car and bus windows, the president’s team had what it wanted. “Made a huge incident,” Haldeman wrote, “and we worked hard to crank it up, should make really major story and might be effective.”¹¹⁰

¹⁰⁹ For a good discussion of Nixon’s general plans for this new coalition, please see Robert Mason, *Richard Nixon and the Quest for a New Majority* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2004), 37-160.

¹¹⁰ H.R. Haldeman, *The Haldeman Diaries: Inside the Nixon White House* (New York: G.P Putman’s Sons, 1994), 205-206. That night, Haldeman noted how Nixon took pleasure inciting the crowd. “All through the day he delighted in giving the ‘V’ to the peaceniks.” See description of the violence and the police chief’s quotation in the

Two days later in Phoenix, an indignant president told a noontime crowd that such “violent thugs” would not prevent a president “from going out and speaking with the American people wherever they want to hear me and wherever I want to go This President is not going to be cooped up in the White House.”¹¹¹ Later that day, Nixon taped his speech on violence in America for broadcast the evening before the midterm elections, hoping to capitalize on the chaos captured by the media in urban areas across the nation. It was a “fighting, arm-waving, give-‘em-hell, law-and-order speech” favored both by Safire and fellow speechwriter Patrick J. Buchanan. Even though they were very different in style and temperament as writers, they personally favored a “fighting president,” one who would wage the battles that some Americans wanted fought, and not look weak in the face of growing social and cultural crisis.¹¹² They supported Nixon as he railed against protestors, suggesting that they used the Vietnam War as their “alibi for violence.”¹¹³ Indeed, this was the approach during the mid-term elections of 1970, as the president enthusiastically campaigned for congressional Republicans, tossing red meat for the faithful like some politicians lobbed baseballs at big games. While this was fine for the true believers at Republican rallies, few thought that Nixon’s efforts at hard driving campaigning might actually keep his silent majority not only silent but at home on Election Day. The night before Americans went to the polls, the president’s law and order speech ran on television, and quickly turned into what Haldeman deputy Jeb Magruder and other staffers thought was a “disaster.” It was a “disjointed, black-and-white, law-and-order tirade [that] was followed immediately by [Senator and Democratic rival] Ed Muskie, in living color, sitting in an armchair by a crackling fire, speaking in the voice of sweet reason,” Magruder wrote. “The contrast was devastating. It was like watching Grandma Moses debate the Boston Strangler.”¹¹⁴

Later that night, Haldeman’s diary entry showed that he generally agreed with the assessment. “TV night, and a real disaster!” The chief of staff tried to blame it on an “audio problem,” suggesting they “didn’t know how bad it was until after the first network, NBC, went on the air.” Haldeman knew, however, that they “had laid a bomb.” Among the president’s staff, there was disagreement over what it all meant, an undercurrent that ran through the White House for the next two years. “Considerable division of opinion within staff about net effect, I think most feel it was bad, some think a disaster,” Haldeman wrote. “The hard-liners [such as Buchanan and Safire] still feel it was good. But the whole mess points up the necessity of checking and rechecking on all these things.”¹¹⁵ In his memoirs, Nixon admitted much the same, revealing his concerns about a serious potential challenger in 1972. “In contrast to the harsh tone of my Phoenix speech, Muskie sounded calm and measured as he spoke from the homey setting of his summer house in Cape Elizabeth, Maine. . . . There was no doubt that Muskie emerged the winner.” The Buchanan/Safire preference for Nixon the fighter was delivered a serious body

New York Times, November 4, 1970, 21. Nixon makes no mention in his memoirs that his campaign hoped for the violence that occurred; however, he suggests that he knew that the police official had “exaggerated” the seriousness of the issue. See Nixon, *RN*, 492-493.

¹¹¹ Nixon, *RN*, 493-494.

¹¹² Jeb Stuart Magruder, *An American Life: One Man’s Road to Watergate* (New York: A Pocket Book Edition, June 1975), 155-156.

¹¹³ Nixon, *RN*, 493-494.

¹¹⁴ Magruder, *An American Life*, 155-156.

¹¹⁵ Haldeman, *Haldeman Diaries*, 206-209.

blow in the final hours of the 1970 campaign, and underscored the emerging internal struggle in the Nixon White House over tactics, strategy, and personalities.¹¹⁶

Haldeman described the following day as “fairly rough.” Both he and the president were disappointed with not only the television fiasco but also the election results, as they had hoped for much more. The Republicans had gained two seats in the Senate but lost nine in the House. Haldeman tried to spin it as a “major victory in the Senate,” as did the president; both knew that it was anything *but* a victory.¹¹⁷ All Nixon and his men needed to do for a reminder was read the morning papers. As Tom Wicker wrote in the *New York Times*, “Richard M. Nixon is too realistic a politician to take much comfort from that kind of victory, whatever he says publicly.” Wicker mused about the “ill-made and high-pitched campaign film” that stood in stark contrast to the “quietly impressive” Senator Muskie.¹¹⁸ Wicker colleague and columnist Warren Weaver agreed, adding that Muskie revealed a “convincing demonstration of personal strength,” suggesting that the two television segments “could hardly have been more different. The Republican film was full of shouting crowds and Mr. Nixon’s free-swinging oratorical thrusts. Senator Muskie spoke in measured tones from an armchair in a living room setting, rarely raising his voice.”¹¹⁹ James Reston also scoffed at any administration claim of victory. “Unfortunately, President Nixon apparently didn’t get the message,” the columnist told his readers. “Even after he had divided his party, violated all of his calls for unity, morality, and integrity, he was still claiming he had won a great victory and strengthened his hand at home and abroad, and particularly in the Senate.” Seeming to anticipate a shake up in the Nixon camp, Reston pointed out that Nixon “tried to overwhelm the opposition in this election, but he failed. Now he will probably minimize his role of party leader and go back to being President.” The veteran journalist suggested that the president made the critical mistake of employing the “old politics” that had once brought him to “the pinnacle of American political life, but they didn’t work in this election.” Instead, he suggested that Nixon only succeeded in dividing the nation and reviving the Democratic Party. The columnist posed a question for his readers: “What lessons will he draw from the campaign for the future? This is the critical question for a President who now has to deal with the old policy problems and the new political realities.”¹²⁰

Nixon was of course furious over the media coverage, blaming the poor showing as “a conspiracy in the press.” But it was evident that both he and his team took the criticism to heart, acutely aware of these “new political realities.”¹²¹ Consequently, for the next few days, the president’s loyal chief of staff was not pleased with his job. Nixon was sullen and Haldeman needed to handhold and try to steer his boss away from his preoccupation with the matter.

¹¹⁶ Nixon, *RN*, 494. Magruder claimed that Safire tried to pawn the speech off on him, but Safire mused that Haldeman’s deputy only assumed he had without asking. See Magruder, *An American Life*, 155-156, and William Safire, *Before The Fall: An Inside View of the Pre-Watergate White House* (New York: Belmont Tower Books, 1975), 338.

¹¹⁷ Haldeman, *Haldeman Diaries*, 206-209.

¹¹⁸ *The New York Times*, November 5, 1970, 47.

¹¹⁹ See the *New York Times*, November 3, 1970, 1, 40-41, and November 5, 1970, 26.

¹²⁰ *The New York Times*, November 5, 1970, 26.

¹²¹ Haldeman, *Haldeman Diaries*, 206-209. See also Nixon, *RN*, 494-495. Nixon often fumed about the *New York Times*, and reporter James Reston in particular, believing the publication should be completely “blackout.” The president had told Haldeman that neither Reston nor anyone else from the newspaper should ever be allowed into the Oval Office. Staff members were “soft” if they intended to “suck up” to the media. As the president instructed his chief of staff, “They are not to talk to the *New York Times*—that order is on and it is final. Nobody at the *New York Times* is to be talked to... You are not going to gain anything by softening up on these people.” See WHT Conversation No.009-010, September 14, 1971, NARA.

Haldeman admitted the president was despondent and “just can’t get himself away from the subject.” By November 6, with Nixon brooding “over and over” about the results, they decided to bring all of the president’s political team down to Key Biscayne, Florida, for a special strategy meeting.¹²²

On November 7, from 11:00 am to 5:00 pm without a break, a gathering of Haldeman, John Ehrlichman, John Mitchell, Donald Rumsfeld, Robert Finch, Bryce Harlow, and Chuck Colson drank endless cups of coffee, ate sandwiches, and planned for the re-election. Noticeably absent were any other members of the Republican Party. They were not invited. It was a sign of things to come for 1972. The conversation did not call out the president’s behavior on the campaign trail as much as it attempted to move the political campaign strategy in a new direction. The easiest and quickest target was the vice president, Spiro Agnew. Haldeman noted that they agreed the vice president’s role was to be “positive and constructive,” while Nixon, understanding all too well the changing dynamic, wrote in his diary that the vice president should “de-escalate the rhetoric without de-escalating the substance of his message. He should be shown fighting for something rather than just railing against everyone.”¹²³ It was an about-face for the president, as he had relished using Agnew as his “cutting edge.” The problem, though, was that Agnew’s knife cut both ways. Nixon had become agitated having his face rubbed in the issue, especially in the manner in which Reston suggested in the *Times* that both Nixon and Agnew had “blundered” with their rhetoric in the midterms, and that the president could no longer expect to “fight a savage election, romanticize the democratic process, proclaim the virtues of unity” and remain in power.¹²⁴

Anger aside, it was clear that the team took heed. The consensus was that it was time to rein in Agnew who had been wielding speeches like a machete. The president also faced insider criticism, specifically from a voice he trusted in such matters, his old pal, John Mitchell. Nixon’s long-serving ally knew that they needed to change strategy if they hoped to win. Mitchell told the president that the speech in Phoenix made him “sound as if [he was] running for District Attorney of Phoenix rather than the President of the United States addressing the American People at the end of an important national campaign.” Haldeman aide Jeb Magruder agreed: “In the longer run, the 1970 disaster persuaded the President that he must change tactics for 1972, that he must take the ‘high road’ when he ran for reelection.”¹²⁵

Putting down the sword did not feel like the highroad for the veteran politician, who knew little else than politics as a blood sport. Thoughts of remaining behind the scenes and out of step with his usual cadence for attack constituted foreign territory. The fallout from the disappointing midterm elections, however, cast a long shadow over the reelection effort in 1972 and a pall over the president. “The first months of 1971 were the lowest point of my first term as President,” Nixon wrote in his memoirs. Even though the president certainly exaggerated, suggesting it “seemed possible that I might not even be nominated for re-election in 1972,” it

¹²² Haldeman, *Haldeman Diaries*, 206-209.

¹²³ Nixon, *RN*, 494-495.

¹²⁴ See the *New York Times*, November 4, 1970, 47. Mitchell’s controversial and outspoken wife Martha relished telling the media “Every place the Republicans lost is their own fault.” See her comments in the *Times*, November 5, 1970, 26.

¹²⁵ Magruder, *An American Life*, 155-156. During the Key Biscayne meeting, it was decided that old Nixon hatchet man Murray Chotiner would work for the Republican National Committee (RNC) as an “organizer.” At the end of the day, Haldeman mused in his diary, “For once something got done.” See Haldeman, *Haldeman Diaries*, 206-209. See also Theodore H. White, *The Making of the President 1972* (New York: Atheneum Publishers, 1974), 48-49; and Safire, *Before the Fall*, 317, 339-342.

illustrates his lack of confidence about the administration's direction emerging from the mid-term elections.¹²⁶ The instinctual politician knew that his recent showing at the polls had put everything into play. As Reston reminded his readers, "When this election of 1970 started, the Democrats were in despair: they felt they had no chance in 1972 to regain the White House: but after the savage Nixon-Agnew campaign of the last few weeks, they are beginning to hope again."¹²⁷

Nixon's stature, and indeed his direction and purpose, had taken a beating heading into 1971, a situation that had the appearances of a leadership vacuum with less than two years before Americans returned to the polls to decide the president's fate. As David Broder and Haynes Johnson told their readers in the *Washington Post*, "Even among [the president's] strongest supporters . . . there is now doubt about what he represents." Moreover, the columnists suggested that the nation thirsted for a leader to emerge, as there was "no clear national leader in sight today."¹²⁸

Of acute concern for the president was the emergence of a politician whom he thought could actually best him at the polls, and that was Maine Senator Edmund Muskie. Nixon's men also feared a Muskie run, believing that the World War II veteran from a Catholic family posed the most difficult of all possible Democrats to run against. Muskie's presence contributed to political insecurity bordering on paranoia. As Magruder recalled in his memoir, "the election-eve television shows had positioned Senator Muskie as the likely Democratic candidate in 1972, and in early 1971, the polls were showing him ahead of the President, a fact that led to panic, to a thirst for political intelligence, to new tactics and new people."¹²⁹ The president considered a host of these tactics including a litany of dirty tricks behind the scenes (while his campaign began to paint a more presidential image of him to the masses), and then turned to his favorite new member of the inner circle. "Increasingly I turned to Chuck Colson to act as my political point-man." As Nixon admitted in his memoirs,

He was positive, persuasive, smart, and aggressively partisan. His instinct for the political jugular and his ability to get things done made him a lightning rod for my own frustrations at the timidity of most Republicans in responding to attacks from the Democrats and the media. When I complained to Colson I felt confident that something would be done, and I was rarely disappointed.¹³⁰

In a guarded memoir, Nixon was seldom this candid.

After 1970, Colson's fingerprints began to cover more memorandums concerning the re-election campaign than anyone in the administration other than Nixon and Haldeman. And in the slow change of tactics to project a more measured public image for the president, born scrappers like Colson contributed to a very motivated but tense inner circle. When campaign manager John Mitchell enlisted Kansas Senator Bob Dole to replace the vice president as the chief flamethrower, allowing Agnew to assume a "more statesmanlike role," Colson continuously pressed for more grit. Dole once protested directly to Magruder about the tone of Colson's proposed speeches. "Jeb, I've got one of those God-damned speeches from Colson," Dole complained. "What am I supposed to do? I can't say that stuff."¹³¹ At most, Mitchell would

¹²⁶ Nixon, *RN*, 496-497.

¹²⁷ See the *New York Times*, November 4, 1970, 47.

¹²⁸ The *Washington Post*, December 19, 1971, 1, A22.

¹²⁹ Magruder, *An American Life*, 156.

¹³⁰ Nixon, *RN*, 496-497.

¹³¹ Magruder, *An American Life*, 174-175.

mollify Dole by telling him to deliver Colson's attacks while trying to tone down some of the extreme rhetoric. Nixon's special counsel increasingly took every opportunity to maneuver events the way he wanted, actions that would also gain the attention of the president, who liked his toughness and his intellect. As Theodore White observed, "Colson's was without a doubt the shrewdest political mind, after Richard Nixon's, in the White House." In the wake of the midterm elections, Colson emerged as a player, distinguishing himself as the hatchet man that Nixon believed he needed. His smear campaign against Democrat Joseph Tydings during the summer campaign caught the president's attention, earning him an invitation to his post-election planning session at Key Biscayne. By early 1971, with Nixon prepared to play a reduced role in his own campaign, Colson became a relentless political force.¹³²

The fallout of November of 1970 caused several of Nixon's aides to reassess their ways of looking at the political terrain for the two years before the election. Even aides such as Safire, who wanted a "fighting president," knew that there was a way for Nixon to shift by capitalizing on the mood in the nation. Far from a disaster, the speechwriter sensed that there was going to be a turn in the momentum in their favor, one stirring in the great American heartland against the anti-war movement, against the college demonstrators, and against those who were criticizing America. Unlike others in the inner circle, who worried about the president's fiery mid-term campaign rhetoric, Safire believed things would turn in their favor, sensing that Nixon's basic verbiage matched the nation's mood. "A responsive chord had been touched, its greater significance not in the image on TV of a divisive President in a fighting mood in Phoenix, but in the revulsion of a growing new majority" to mob violence and student unrest. The sense that there was a "new majority" seething and yearning for representation slowly emerged and took form as part of the campaign strategy in the following months. While the concept of building a new majority was nothing new to Nixon's men, what was new was the specific intention to carve this emerging majority directly from the heart of the traditional Democratic coalition. The critical factor was to create the idea in the heartland that the Democrats were in bed with the protestors and the benefactors of the establishment, while President Nixon was the sole representative of Middle America. These core ideas emerged as one and constituted a viable strategy for 1972.¹³³

The move towards breaking up the Democratic coalition and separating the Democratic Party from its traditional base in 1972 dated back to memos as early as October of 1971. Working intently on this issue, Buchanan's research team provided a memo to Haldeman and Mitchell entitled, "Dividing the Democrats." The plan was to divide the party along ideological lines, such as highlighting differences between "the left and the New Left versus the moderate and conservative Democrats." Buchanan believed that since "militant blacks" and the "radical chic of Eastern liberalism" are in conflict with "the blue collar [and] white collar conservative Democrats," a great deal of attention should be devoted to highlighting this division in surrogates' speeches. The political strategist suggested, "...our great hope for 1972 lies in maintaining or exacerbating the deep Democratic rift between the elite, chic, New Left, intellectual, avant-garde, isolationist, bell-bottomed, environmentalist, new-priorities types on one hand—and the hard hat, Dick Daley, Holy Name Society, ethnic, blue collar, Knights of Columbus, NYPD, Queens Democrats on the other." In December 1971, Buchanan was blunt,

¹³² White, *Breach of Faith*, 184-186.

¹³³ Safire believed that the "backlash against demonstrators....gained momentum, strengthening Nixon's hand and presaging his easy domination of McGovern two years later." The speechwriter also suggested that Haldeman overreacted to the situation in 1970 and as a result, wanted "Nixon to be so far above the battle as to be out of it." See Safire, *Before the Fall*, 340, 644.

suggesting to Haldeman, “what we want is a deadlocked, divided convention, just as the Democrats wanted a knock-down drag-out between Nixon-Rockefeller-Reagan in 1968.” There was a problem, however, as Nixon’s men were concerned that Muskie was going to emerge as the strongest candidate heading into 1972. As Nixon’s loyal speechwriter warned, “What I am afraid of is that the Democrats are going to wake up in March, and find the nomination closed—accept that fact, and rally behind him.” The senator from Maine had begun to capture national attention, a reality that reverberated throughout the Democratic Party. “One friend high up in the Democratic National Committee tells me that there is a possibility if Muskie rolls through Wisconsin, Kennedy will endorse him,” Buchanan wrote. “I can’t believe that—but if something like that occurred—we’ve got problems.”¹³⁴

To avoid the “problems” of a Democratic Party united behind a candidate such as Muskie, the plan was to keep their opponents off balance by moving strongly after that party’s traditional wing. As staffer John C. Whitaker suggested in a memorandum to Haldeman, “We have become the heir to the old FDR coalition—almost—and the South for sure—ethnic groups in the North (Jewish and Catholic in particular) and, to a lesser extent, Labor.”¹³⁵ Haldeman could also be particularly blunt about such issues in internal memorandums. As he wrote on August 7, 1972, “Catholic, ethnics, and old folks” are “much more important than Jewish or Black.”¹³⁶ The most coherent strategy for a new coalition carved from traditional Democratic voters, however, came from Charles Colson. More than a mere hatchet man, the president’s special counsel was the principal author of the plan for capturing these traditional Democratic voters. “Colson was the first person in the White House to see that we had a chance to cut deeply into traditionally Democratic groups, including Catholics and blue collar workers, in the 1970 and 1972 elections,” Magruder wrote in his memoir. Despite his antipathy at best for his former colleague, believing that Colson was as responsible for Nixon’s failures as his successes, Magruder saw Colson’s input on this point as decisive. “Colson’s efforts in 1970 and 1971 had paved the way for the President’s success with unions, Catholics, ethnics, and other special-interest groups in 1972.”¹³⁷

Magruder was not alone in this assessment. Several in the inner circle were aware that Colson spoke to Nixon on numerous occasions concerning this “*winning*” issue in the two years leading up to the 1972 election. The special counsel impressed upon the president that targeting white ethnic, blue-collar, hardhat, and Catholic suburbs that circled around the growing cities was a winner. Safire, who credited Colson as the chief author of Nixon’s proposed new majority, suggested that the special counsel was critical for moving it ahead. Colson “filled a need for Nixon, who wanted an intermediary other than Haldeman to push John Mitchell and John Ehrlichman. On most of the Catholic issues, Mitchell and Ehrlichman differed with the

¹³⁴ This plan helps explain why the later nomination of McGovern was received so enthusiastically, as he was a Democrat whom they believed they could denounce as a radical on the fringe of his own party. See memorandum and attached file of October 5, 1971, Buchanan Papers, Box 3, NARA. See also Memorandum from Pat Buchanan to H.R. Haldeman, December 10, 1971, Buchanan Papers, Box 3, NARA, and J. Anthony Lukas, *Nightmare: The Underside of the Nixon Years* (New York: Penguin Books, 1988), 150-151.

¹³⁵ Memorandum from John C. Whitaker to H.R. Haldeman, July 21 1972, White House Special Files, Box 8, Nixon Library.

¹³⁶ Haldeman memorandum of August 7, 1972, WHSF, Contested Files, Box 7, Nixon Library.

¹³⁷ Magruder, *An American Life*, 75, 314.

President; Colson was to be the goad.” For the president, catering to the Catholic constituency gained increasing importance and traction as the team moved into 1971.¹³⁸

As a result, what emerged for the election was more of a *Northern* strategy, or as *Washington Post* columnist and John Mitchell protégé Kevin Phillips called it, a “post-Southern strategy.” The White House felt that while it could not exactly take the South for granted, it was not concerned that Alabama Governor George Wallace would mount anything near the fight he had in 1968, running on the independent ticket, if he ran at all. The internal communiqués reveal that the inner circle did not believe that its Democratic opponents could siphon off disaffected Wallace supporters and his votes were theirs for the taking. The Nixon White House scoffed at the notion that Dixie would go for a Democrat on the top of a national ticket, no matter who the eventual nominee was in 1972. With the administration’s assurance of support from the Solid South, Nixon’s men increased their attention on the northern industrial states, targeting the white ethnic conservatives, Catholics, and industrial workers, whom they believed would be turned off the more “radical” edge of the Democratic Party.¹³⁹

Although Nixon’s men had begun to hone their heartland vocabulary during the election of 1968, they had used it only sporadically for the first two years in the White House, and by the end of 1970, it had waned. After the midterm elections, it became a staple for the next two years. The critical difference then was that the message needed to be managed, repackaged, and presented for broader national consumption. The basic plan for building the new GOP majority for the reelection in 1972 was to join North, South, and West by focusing on the battleground states of Pennsylvania, New Jersey, Ohio, Illinois, and Missouri. The strategy was to “go to the center,” and appeal to the “broad middle of the voting spectrum.”¹⁴⁰

Much of this “centrist strategy” can be traced earlier when Nixon and his team first planned to catch the remnants left over from what they believed was the imminent destruction of the New Deal coalition. Kevin Phillips, the young political strategist and his ideas for capturing “Middle America” in the voting booth were well known in the Nixon camp. Phillips, who worked for the campaign in the 1968 election, published his theory in a 1969 book entitled, *The Emerging Republican Majority*, that some envisioned as the future for the party. Nixon had earlier referred to the real possibility of this new majority forming under “an alliance of ideas,” that would link voting and regional “power blocs” together. As a result, the president was

¹³⁸ Safire, *Before the Fall*, 486, 559. See also H.R. Haldeman, *The Ends of Power*, (New York: Times Books, 1978), 162-163; and White, *The Making of the President, 1972*, 49-51. Buchanan thought that it would be a good idea for the president to send a letter to Cardinal Cooke expressing the president’s “personal” views against abortion since “the President is on record against abortion.” There are numerous memorandums concerning the importance of pulling the Catholic vote away from the Democrats. See Memorandum from Pat Buchanan to Charles Colson and John Ehrlichman, August 13, 1972; Pat Buchanan to Hank Paulson, August 10 1972; Pat Buchanan to John McLaughlin, August 10, 1972; Pat Buchanan to Jeb Stuart Magruder, August 1, 1972; Pat Buchanan to Anne Higgins, August 4, 1972; Pat Buchanan to the President, August 2, 1972; and Pat Buchanan to Charles Colson and H.R. Haldeman, April 20, 1972. All of these documents are from Buchanan Papers, Box 2, NARA.

¹³⁹ See the Kevin Phillips article in the *Washington Post*, September 25, 1970, A25. See also Memorandum to the President from Dick Howard, October 21, 1972, Howard Papers, Box 23, NARA, and John Ehrlichman, *Witness to Power: The Nixon Years* (New York: Pocket Books, 1982), 187. As Magruder had recalled, “The Wallace supporters turned out to be Nixon supporters by a huge majority, and I think we felt that from the beginning.” See Magruder in Ernest R. May, ed., *Campaign ’72: The Managers Speak* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1973), 65.

¹⁴⁰ See Nixon’s nationwide radio speech from May 16, 1968. See also the memorandum to the President from Dick Howard, October 21, 1972, NARA, Howard Papers, Box 23; and Garry Wills, *Nixon Agonistes: The Crisis of the Self-Made Man* (New York: A Signet Book, 1970), 286-288.

swayed by Phillips's updated article in the *Washington Post* that appeared in September 1970, arguing for just such an approach. The president was concerned, though, that some on his domestic staff, namely John Ehrlichman, just didn't understand the importance of this "go to the center" strategy.¹⁴¹

Senior political strategists such as Patrick Buchanan were not only on board with the message, but worried continuously that the Democrats were planning to use the same strategy. As far back as the summer of 1970, Buchanan planned for 1972 with this thought in mind. The concern was the adjustments the Democrats were making towards moving out of their traditional voting blocs and looking to compete for the disaffected voters including the Wallaceites eyed by Republicans in the reelection bid. Buchanan worried about what he thought was a "blueprint for our defeat in 1972," a model laid out in the book, *The Real Majority* by Richard Scammon and Ben Wattenburg, where a strategy for a liberal Democratic victory in 1972 appeared plausible. Buchanan proposed a counter-strategy. "Liberals," he warned, "are waking up all over America . . . ; they have begun talking about law and order; they have ceased apologizing for student militants and black radicals; they are silent on busing. We are no longer going to win the race for Middle America by default." Buchanan laid out a counter-strategy for victory in 1972. Buchanan stressed that victory meant moving to the "center" of American politics, stressing the idea that the "the party that can hold the center will win the Presidency." For Buchanan, the winning strategy lay in the book's following passage: "You can knock the 'liberal intellectuals' out of the Democratic coalition, and you've lost the front bumper; knock out the black vote, and you have lost the fenders and the back seat; but knock out labor, Middle America, or the unpoor, unyoung, unblack, and you've lost the engine, and the car won't run. This is an unpleasant fact to some, but fact it is."¹⁴²

While this cold political reality did not faze Buchanan, he seriously questioned his party's footing for such a "new majority" leap, wondering if the incumbent Republicans could assume the stance of a majority party after so many years of seeing themselves only as a fighting minority. The myopic stance was not improved by an administration that waged war from the front door of the White House as the party in power, yet railed against their institutional "enemies" in the media and the Eastern Establishment. Bill Safire mused about the irony of a party in power acting like one out of power, but suggested that what historian Richard Hofstadter referred to as the "paranoid style in American politics" was used for the first time by the leader of the majority, or at least by a leader who claimed to be supported by the great 'silent majority.' Safire was blunt in his assessment. The White House assumed this posture because "it worked. Just as the NATO alliance was created by fear of the Soviet power along its border, so did the Silent Majority identify itself by the presence of the noisy minority." This new majority that emerged with the failure of the Great Society programs and the tragedy in Vietnam had "grown

¹⁴¹ See Ehrlichman, *Witness to Power*, 187-194. Ehrlichman vehemently denied that he did not understand the importance of the Phillips' article. Rather, as he suggested in an October 21st, 1970 memo to the president, it was that Phillips "misunderstands" the political complexity of this issue, and may alienate many of the voters they intended to attract with what Ehrlichman believed was Phillips's "pure conservative line." Also see Nixon's nationwide radio speech from May 16, 1968; Memorandum to the President from Dick Howard, October 21, 1972, Howard Papers, Box 23, NARA; Wills, *Nixon Agonistes*, 286-288; Haldeman, *Haldeman Diaries*, 145; Perlstein, *Nixonland*, 277; and Mason, *Richard Nixon and the Quest for a New Majority*, 47-50, for a good discussion of Phillips' influence inside the Nixon White House.

¹⁴² Memorandum from Pat Buchanan to the President, August 24, 1970, WHSF, Box 49, Nixon Library. See also, Richard Scammon and Ben Wattenburg, *The Real Majority* (New York: Coward McCann, 1970) for a further discussion.

accustomed to being the permanent minority” for several decades. Conservative communist hunters like Nixon, who faced the anti-war movement during his first term, still felt like a majority “surrounded by a minority.” As Safire suggested, even though the president “was safely on the inside [he] remained the perennial Outsider.” This was a view shared by many in his Nixon White House.¹⁴³

In January 1971, Buchanan sat in his office in the Old Executive Office Building (EOB) adjacent to the White House surrounded by stacks of newspaper clippings and polling data and put his finger directly on this issue. As he pondered the 21 months before the next election, he thought about his adversaries in the Democratic Party. Buoyed by their showing in the mid-term elections, they were planning for a big get-out-the-vote strategy in 1972, gunning for the party in power in the Executive Branch. Buchanan realized that even though his party had not wrestled away Congress from the Democrats, they were still the big dogs in the White House; they were the “ins” and it was not a position with which Nixon’s band of pit fighters were comfortable. For Buchanan, this was not a winning strategy. He needed a different idea. The speechwriter rolled up his sleeves, placed a fresh sheet of paper in his typewriter, and laid out his concerns to White House press secretary Ron Ziegler:

...look back at our great victories in the last quarter century—1946 when we took over the Eightieth Congress, 1952, the Eisenhower Landslide which brought us to power in Congress, 1968 when we won the Presidency again. In each of those elections, Republicans won because we were against the ins. “Had enough”—remember that theme from 1946, Milt (Young). In 1952, it was “the mess in Washington.” In 1968 it was crime and Vietnam and campus anarchy and riots. Those are the only times in my political lifetime we have prevailed—and we have prevailed because, basically, we were the “against” party.¹⁴⁴

The conundrum, of course, was that it was difficult to secure a second term in the White House pretending to be “outsiders” trying to kick “the bums out.” Buchanan believed that one way to bring this magic about was to stoke their own brand of Republican populism, and thus began to push for a populist message in the heartland. The idea was that they would speak for real Americans in a world taken over by longhairs and leftists and their friends in the Democratic controlled Congress. Some within the inner circle believed such an idea was a winner given the historical realities of 1972, and Buchanan, for one, planned to push this envelope. “Now for the first time since Teddy Roosevelt, it is we who have the initiative, we who stand for sweeping change, we who stand for restoring power to the people—and the other side on Capitol Hill has suddenly become the party of the Status Quo.”¹⁴⁵

Such an effort would prove to be a tall order and required a careful balancing act, as it appeared that the nation was not in the mood for “sweeping change,” but rather longed for stability and security. As Theodore White observed, the domestic bombings of 1970 made Americans nervous, and the political high ground was up for grabs. After the shootings at Kent State that year and the massive student revolt against the administration’s policies in Southeast Asia—the last of the massive protests of the era—Americans were wary, exhausted, and looking for answers and steadiness.¹⁴⁶

¹⁴³ Safire, *Before the Fall*, 275-277, 285. See also Drew, *Richard M. Nixon*, 39-40.

¹⁴⁴ Memorandum from Pat Buchanan to Ron Ziegler, January 29, 1971, Buchanan Papers, Box 1, NARA.

¹⁴⁵ Memorandum from Pat Buchanan to Ron Ziegler, January 29, 1971, Buchanan Papers, Box 1, NARA.

¹⁴⁶ White, *Breach of Faith*, 167-169. See also Kenneth Heinemann, *Campus Wars: The Peace Movement At American State Universities in the Vietnam Era* (New York: New York University 1994) for an extensive look at violence and unrest on the nation’s college campuses.

The internal White House memorandums reveal a subtle but perceptible awareness of this exhaustion, and that the nation did not want “sweeping change.” Buchanan, himself, actually spoke to this issue directly. In a memorandum to Haldeman, the speechwriter suggested the complete opposite of his earlier memorandums. The president was “elected not because he was Mr. Excitement, but because he was Mr. Reliable,” Buchanan wrote, suggesting that Nixon occupied the White House “because the American people felt him the toughest, most competent, most able and intelligent man to hold the job in a time of crisis.” What the president represented was a “return to basic principles that could guide America through the storms of 1968.” Richard Nixon, the speechwriter stressed, “*does not* represent ‘change.’ He represents ‘stability.’ We did not get here on personality—and personality will not keep us here. We are not selling charisma. We are selling competence.”¹⁴⁷

Nixon then was *not* going to be the harbinger of massive change but of staying the course during a difficult time. As Buchanan enunciated, “In boom times, people go for the convertible, the hard top, the tail fins... They will buy a Nixon when they need a professional. Were it not for the incredible mess of 1968, which we were assigned to clean up, the nation would never have turned to the Republicans or the quintessential Mr. Republican.”¹⁴⁸ Trouble and discord then were advantageous as long as it did not *appear* that the leader was likely to contribute to those fears. Rather, the emerging strategy suggested that the president would need to sooth and calm the nation by employing a steady hand, and the best way to accomplish that was to connect with those in the heartland.

The idea put forth then was that the president understood the people’s fears because he was one of *them*, an ordinary American, despite what their “enemies” in the national media might tell them. Buchanan knew that this slow and thoughtful change in their strategy would pay dividends. Indeed, by early 1972, he wrote about the connection in a memo to Colson: “We should also hammer the point that though the pundits write the President off every other week, his personal appearances before the country on television have turned the polls around.” Buchanan stressed that despite the actions of the “hostile liberal Eastern media,” the president had emerged strong, and does not need the “Mandate of Heaven” that it gave to Lyndon Johnson. “President Nixon has gone for years without their endorsement, indeed, with their opposition; because his strength, like FDR’s, lies with the common man.”¹⁴⁹ Buchanan and his assistant Ken Khachigian had begun to float memos and talking points to surrogate speakers showing Nixon’s “empathy” with the nation’s farmers, arguing that it was something that Nixon did much better and more naturally than a man like George McGovern, even though the latter came from a farm state. The speechwriter and political strategist knew they could sell Dick Nixon in rural America.¹⁵⁰

¹⁴⁷ See undated memo in early January, 1972 from Pat Buchanan to H.R. Haldeman, Buchanan Papers, Box 5, NARA. Emphasis added.

¹⁴⁸ See undated memo in early January, 1972 from Pat Buchanan to H.R. Haldeman, Buchanan Papers, Box 5, NARA. See also Memorandum from Pat Buchanan to Charles Colson, February 4, 1971, Buchanan Papers, Box 2, NARA.

¹⁴⁹ Memorandum from Pat Buchanan to Charles Colson, February 4, 1971, Buchanan Papers, Box 2, NARA.

¹⁵⁰ There are numerous memos from December 1971 through January 1972 on this theme. See memos of December 3, 1971 and January 14, 1972, Buchanan Papers, Box 2, NARA. It was a plan that they continued to implement throughout election year with “targeted commercials to specific groups” in the farm belt. As Buchanan noted later, “The media attack advertising is the way to do it.” See Attack Organization and Strategy Memorandum, Pat Buchanan and Ken Khachigian to John Mitchell, March 14, 1972, Haldeman Papers, Box 97, NARA.

From the scribes on upward the idea emerged that the president understood people on the land, those who farmed and toiled on the soil for their livelihood. Accordingly, the team wanted the president to read articles that captured the “farm ethic” so he could more easily communicate with those in the heartland and develop an “empathy with their life-style.” Nixon staffers saw it as a natural fit for someone from the president’s background. As Khachigian indicated in a memo to Buchanan, “I think the reason farmers like RN is that his life has paralleled their own in many ways. He is a farmer who never farmed. Armed with the gut feeling of agricultural America, the President will continue to move at the top with farmers and score high politically as well.”¹⁵¹

Forged in the cramped offices of the EOB was the notion that Nixon possessed something intrinsic—an innate and transferable connection to the hallowed endeavors of farming despite his life’s non-agrarian path. Middle Americans would support Nixon as the stable choice in 1972 because he was safe, measured, and, like them, was rooted in the soil. This tenuous connection is curious, because according to some inside the beltway, Nixon’s men were anything but grounded by a sense of place. As Safire mused about his many California colleagues, they were akin to “loners, transients, men without roots—all of this is frequently attributed to the Californians.” The speechwriter suggested that this sense of displacement led to a particular dynamic, or a “political relentlessness” that marked not only the president but also many of his team that he brought with him from the coast and into the White House.¹⁵²

Moreover, Nixon’s aversion to pressing the flesh in large crowds and reaching out to meet with “real” Americans is well documented. Once the young Nixon left for Whittier College, he never ventured near an orange grove or any other farm for a non-political cause again. The president’s men, too, were educated urbanites with no significant ties to the agrarian heartland. Washington-born-and-raised strategists and wordsmiths such as Pat Buchanan, however, claimed they represented something intangible, a connection that transcended mere immersion in Middle American loam. He suggested that they could speak a language that those in the heartland understood. The Nixon White House would win with their lexis—a collection of comforting idioms that would pull on the bucolic heartstrings. As Buchanan explained to Haldeman, “...Democrats like the Kennedys or even LBJ—who would go to Appalachia and tramp around in the mud. We are pre-eminently men of words—not men of gestures or symbols.”¹⁵³

With words, the president’s team would express their candidate’s character and what the man born in the house his father built in Yorba Linda, California, was all about. They could not, however, transform him into a beloved character. Richard Nixon could not become an iconic Hollywood celebrity. “Who is the president?” Buchanan asked. “We must recognize finally that Richard Nixon is not Woodrow Wilson; he is not Harry Truman; he is not Jack Kennedy—he is Richard M. Nixon and all of the President’s Horses and all the President’s men are not going to alter perceptibly the impression he has made upon the American people over twenty-five years.”¹⁵⁴ Speechwriters such as Bill Safire did not believe that selling Nixon to the heartland was much of a stretch, as Nixonian enemies were also the enemies of “ordinary Americans.” The president’s adversaries included not only the media and the “Eastern Establishment,” but

¹⁵¹ Memorandum from Ken Khachigian to Pat Buchanan, January 13, 1972, Khachigian Papers, Box 8, NARA.

¹⁵² Safire, *Before the Fall*, 276.

¹⁵³ Memorandum from Pat Buchanan to H.R. Haldeman, undated, from early January, 1972, Buchanan Papers, Box 5, NARA.

¹⁵⁴ Memorandum from Pat Buchanan to H.R. Haldeman, undated, from early January, 1972, Buchanan Papers, Box 5, NARA

“elitism,” “welfarism” and “permissiveness,” or what Safire called Nixon’s “thematic villains.” Denunciation of these threats to the bucolic “work ethic” way of life that Nixon championed would surely resonate with the hard hats, the white ethnics, and the Catholics they wanted to lure into the fold in 1972.¹⁵⁵

Indeed, rural idioms were the staple of Nixon’s men, including Vice President Spiro Agnew, who spoke with an increasing zeal about this “old fashioned constituency.” Agnew loved to remind crowds that President Nixon respected those who “work hard; who pay their taxes; save to send their children to college; obey laws; do their bit for the community; and believe in things like God, the Constitution and a moral as well as legal order to do right. If these are ‘old fashioned’ ideas, then I am proud to be ‘old fashioned,’ and represent an ‘old fashioned’ constituency.” The idea was that old-fashioned people liked old-fashioned politicians, those who were also “regular guys” who “understand people’s problems” and are “as concerned as they are.”¹⁵⁶ The resurrected theme in 1972 was to appeal to Americans who felt that the nation had forgotten them, something that came naturally to Nixon. As acclaimed historian and journalist Garry Wills suggested:

Nixon did not invent “the Forgotten American”—neither the phrase nor the concept; but he used it perfectly. He knew that 1968 was a time when those who had *succeeded* felt somehow cheated—forgotten, unrespected, mocked. They had worked and earned, not only for money or material things, but for a spiritual goal. They had believed in the morality of succeeding. And now the kids, the sophisticates, the “effete snobs” were denying them that honor. Nixon came to reassure such men, to tell them he believed in them, he had not forgotten, he was one of them.¹⁵⁷

Wills’ cynicism implies that Nixon’s appeal to the heartland constituted reaching out to people unworthy of devoted representation. The reason was that this constituency represented a “vague accumulating lean westward, inward, and backward.” This resentful class, he argues, was easy pickings for a man like Nixon whose anti-establishment rants constituted learned behavior. “Every campaign had taught Nixon the same lesson: mobilize resentment against those in power.”¹⁵⁸ Nixon’s inner circle, however, intended to reach out to this great and silent populace. While cynical, perhaps, the president’s team of loyalists were also pragmatic, driven by keen political instinct and a certainty that they had their finger on the heartbeat in the heartland, and one they could transform into electoral cash.

This strategy was much more sophisticated and nuanced than it might appear. Instead of merely preaching to the choir, as Agnew had done on the mid-term election trail like he was throwing meat scraps to pit bulls, there was a renewed understanding that the political message could be used for more than to play on their fears and resentments, as historians Rick Perlstein and Wills have suggested. The strategy included tempering and repackaging the message to reassure Americans about the strength and decency of their nation and to speak the language that

¹⁵⁵ Safire, *Before the Fall*, 309-310. See also Nixon, *RN*, 3.

¹⁵⁶ Spiro Agnew, *Collected Speeches of Spiro Agnew* (New York: Audubon Books, 1971), 18.

¹⁵⁷ Wills, *Nixon Agonistes*, 287-288. There was also a push to find anything that gave the impression to Middle Americans that the president was indeed one of “them.” In one interesting memo, Jon Huntsman suggested to Colson, “The president requested that you note that there are 52 million American Bowlers according to the latest poll. (The President was advised of this fact during his meeting with the winners of the Seventh World International Bowling Federation Tournament, September 17, 1971).” See memorandum from Jon M. Huntsman to Colson, Ccd through Alexander Butterfield and Dwight Chapin, September 18, 1971, WHSF, Contested Files, Box 53, Nixon Library.

¹⁵⁸ Wills, *Nixon Agonistes*, 75-76, 82-83, 89.

sought to build the nation up and contrast it with language with threatened to tear it down. It was a mantra eagerly consumed by this constituency, and the politically astute on the Nixon team sensed it. As the president had recalled after the midterm elections, it was not the words but the approach that his vice president used that was deemed controversial.

The White House staff memorandums reveal awareness that the majority of non-protesting Americans were tired of a counterculture that told them their nation was wrong and unworthy of respect. The plan was to encourage the basic message that the vice president had used to good effect in the heartland. Agnew reminded these Americans that his party loved America even though the antiwar movement and their friends in the Democratic Party did not. As Agnew told a crowd in Jackson, Mississippi, "The Republican Party has faith in America. We see no gain in tearing this Country down when we have so much to build . . . And above all we remember that this Country is a constitutional republic which elects its leaders to *lead* and not to placate to most vocal critics of the moment." The vice president knew how to wave the flag as well as swing a sword. "The Republican Party has a place for every American who believes that flag waving is better than flag burning." As he told a crowd in Tulsa, Oklahoma, "We are not ready to run up a white flag for the United States of America, and we don't think you are either." To those in the heartland, he promised that Nixon would put an end to the "glib, activist element who would tell us our values are lies. . . I call them snobs for most of them disdain to mingle with the masses who work for a living. They mock the common man's pride in his work, his family and his country." Of course, there was no question who the "they" were that he felt mocked the common man. They were the "elites" in the Democratic Party that Nixon's men planned to connect to the chaos of the sixties in the public mind. Unlike the Democrats during that decade, they would remind Americans that the Republican Party under Richard Nixon would keep the nation "out of the ditch." From the ashes of Chicago emerged a struggle to win the war for law and order not only over the "wayward few" but over an alliance of evil, or as Agnew suggested, the "Georgetown-Manhattan-Hyannisport elitist axis," which the White House would declare, did not care for those out in the middle of America.¹⁵⁹

The president's men intended to play this card in 1972. Nixon would be the president "of the forgotten men," as Garry Wills had enunciated. He would be the leader of the "affluent displaced persons who howled at Wallace rallies, heartbroken, moneyed, without style." Indeed, this was style that reemerged in the truest of forms for the reelection campaign. Nixon, perhaps better than anyone, understood the lessons of 1968. He was acutely aware of those in the "silent center." As Wills rightly suggested, they were the millions of Middle Americans "who do not demonstrate, who do not picket or protest loudly." They were, as he adeptly pointed out, "the vast middle range of the comfortable disconnected" who are not "the kind who march or riot. They just lock their doors. And they vote."¹⁶⁰

By the summer of 1972 as George McGovern closed in on the Democratic Party's nomination, internal White House memorandums reminded those up and down the communication food chain that, "RN has not, will not, take for granted the 'forgotten American' of his 1968 Acceptance Speech."¹⁶¹ They would remind Americans, as Agnew had in speeches across that nation, that "the time has come for someone to represent the workingmen of this country, the forgotten man of American politics. The president and I are applying for that job."

¹⁵⁹ See Agnew, *Collected Speeches*, 19, 73, 68, 69, 104, 228, 229, 289, 299, and "Richard Milhous McCain," *The Economist*, September 20, 2008, 48.

¹⁶⁰ Wills, *Nixon Agonistes*, 61-76.

¹⁶¹ Memorandum from Rodney Campbell to Ray Price, July 6, 1972, Chapin Papers, Box 23, NARA.

The problem, of course, was that by the summer before the election, the Nixon administration had been in power for three and a half years. With a skittish economy, rising prices, and worries over an energy shortage, the Nixon re-election campaign needed more ammunition—they needed to remind voters what might transpire under a Democratic leader like George McGovern—a return to the darkness of 1968 under Lyndon Johnson.

Junior speechwriter David Gergen was one among many who wished to remind the campaign that voters needed to remember the chaos of 1968 and mark how far the nation had come under the leadership of the Nixon administration. In a memo to speechwriter Ray Price, Gergen suggested what the campaign themes needed to stress: “We’re on the right road again; peace is near at home and abroad; the way is now open for stunning new breakthroughs,” and “only with Nixon and the Republican Congress can we break in the clearing.” Gergen stressed that in order to engage the public, there needed to be “a sense of excitement about the future” because “for the first time in a quarter century” the president “has the momentum and the ability” to achieve great things. The contrasting message was to compare where the nation was with where it had been four years earlier. As Gergen suggested, “These points are a shorthand for what I believe should be the broader argument. It runs something like this: Remember 1968? We’re clearly better off today, and only because the Nixon presidency has meant a dramatic reversal of previous trends.” The issue was that the nation should fear returning to the past, as an “elite” would once again try to intervene and plunge the nation back into chaos. Gergen suggested that the message should be that the Democrats under someone like McGovern were the risky choice that would put this momentum in serious peril. He thought that the focus should be the “...realization that it would now be foolhardy to go charging off in another direction on an untamed bucking bronco.”¹⁶²

Going into the 1972 election, the job of Nixon’s men was to convince Americans that the president was the steady hand, the leader who understood not only their alienation and dissatisfaction, but their fear for any return to the turmoil of the 1960s. Moreover, the team needed to alleviate the alarm over the bombings and student revolts that occurred over the first two years of Nixon’s own watch. Those in the White House knew very well that their administration was the result of a narrow election victory over Hubert Humphrey and a fractured Democratic Party, and that they had to fight and claw for each and every vote. As Theodore White pointed out, “There was no constituent majority to which [Nixon] could point as the base for his mandate to govern,” as the president’s 1968 victory took place in a nation “torn by war and split by race hatreds.” From the ashes of that tumultuous year, the men who had used their skills to wage campaign warfare were suddenly called upon to “shape a government . . . Nixon was dependant, thus, not on a majority or a mandate, but on a team.”¹⁶³

In his mid-term election post-mortem to Haldeman, Nixon acknowledged his dependence on this team. The president wrote, “I was going to take the advice of nearly all those around me and firmly and flatly keep out of my re-election campaign until as late as possible in 1972.” The Nixonian team was on the spot. The pressure from the president was to avoid another 1970-type outcome at the polls. No one was immune to the external or internal pressures that grew as the campaign began to take form. The character of the reelection effort was shaped by the inner circle’s fierce loyalty not only to the president but the ability to project influence inside the White House.¹⁶⁴

¹⁶² Memorandum from David Gergen to Ray Price, July 7, 1972, Chapin Papers, Box 23, NARA.

¹⁶³ White, *Breach of Faith*, 106.

¹⁶⁴ Nixon, *RN*, 496.

Speechwriter and conservative firebrand Pat Buchanan, for one, was never completely convinced that the president's fighting demeanor was a negative, as political dog fighting was in his blood. Buchanan liked the idea of a "fighting president" because it fit with his own personality. The strategist relished memories from the administration's first year in office, and often reminded Nixon of his success as a fighter. As Buchanan suggested directly to Nixon, "One recalls that the President rated highest with the American people when he was fighting for survival of the presidency in November of 1969, against the media and demonstrators alike...This is not so much an ideological thing, as it is something within the spirit of the American people, who love a good fight....Better a howling press and high polls, than a quiescent somnolent press and low polls." The speechwriter thought that it was "not the President's campaigning itself in 1970 that cost him public support—as the media had reported. Rather, it was the media description of that campaign—well after it was over—that, subsequently, convinced the American people we had run a 'un-presidential' campaign in 1970." Using the old Nixon "enemy," Buchanan wrote that the national polls for Nixon dropped after the election when the media charged the administration as "dirty campaigners." Knowing that such an approach would win favor with the president, the political strategist suggested, "It was the media construction of the President's campaign then, not the campaign itself, which cost us support." So while Buchanan as an astute political operative would not insist that his boss assume a position that others claimed would hurt him, he decided that since the media would misrepresent the president's passion as misplaced Tricky-Dicky anger, his job was to ensure the campaign for re-election did not give the press anything it could use. Moreover, he would reinforce not only the president's mantra that the media was out to get him, but position himself as the president's loyal defender.¹⁶⁵

Buchanan's view of the media, however, was not particularly unique, and it spoke to the team's frustration and almost siege mentality that at times imbued the president's staff. While one of the perennial battlegrounds was the Washington press corps, it was an entity that the team intended to use in the lead up to the election.¹⁶⁶ Managing something as important as the media during the campaign had led to some internal strains and positioning for power among the White House staff. If Richard Nixon were to remain above the fray and present a "presidential" posture, his men would need to compensate, and it often affected their interactions with one another. Indeed, the president's own mistrust of the press shaped not only the team's outlook, but helped shift power within the White House. Pat Buchanan, of course, was not the only loyalist who sought the president's ear and approval, but the manner of gaining it was another story for others connected to the Oval Office. Special Counsel to the President, Charles Colson, also believed that many of the problems in 1970 after the mid-terms could be laid on the press, but the strategist went a step further, as he blamed the manner in which some of the president's veteran staffers dealt with the media. It was not long before the man in Colson's crosshairs was long-time Nixon man Herbert Klein, the director of the White House Office of Communications. Klein was a low-key old-style newspaperman, a trait that Colson construed as weakness and ineffectiveness. Viewing the mid-term debacle as an opportunity to gain power in the offices next to the Oval Office, Colson believed that nothing was off limits to his influence and moved in and tried to remove Klein and take over the Office of Communications. Among Colson's first moves was to usurp the director's power by overstepping him by speaking directly with the television networks, making Klein appear not in control of his own house. In response, Klein

¹⁶⁵ Memorandum from Pat Buchanan to the President, January 13, 1972, Buchanan Papers, Box 2, NARA.

¹⁶⁶ See media discussion in Chapters 5 and 6.

fired off a memo to Colson in protest. “Your continued calls have caused network heads to ask me privately—are you leaving?...With actions like this you make my work harder.” Magruder recalled the situation. “It was a sad memo, really, and a sad situation. Klein had been a Nixon loyalist for twenty years, but knew Colson’s star was rising and Klein’s was falling.” The move, though, was part of a larger overhaul of the public relations apparatus that the president wanted. Klein, the traditional newsman, could no longer count on the strong backing of Nixon or Haldeman and thus became an easy target for the aggressive Colson. In the new multi-media news environment, Colson wanted action against what he saw as the enemy. The “soft” Klein in charge was not up to the task.¹⁶⁷

Special Assistant to the President Fred Malek’s review of the communications operation did not help Klein any. Malek suggested that Colson should assume control of the project managers and the speaker’s bureau from Klein, reducing the director to a liaison with the television networks. The president wanted a “miracle worker” for PR, someone who would “bull dog” all of his pet projects through to fruition. By his own admission, Magruder was never aggressive enough to be the man, but soon Nixon found his man in Colson. As Magruder recalled, “The power struggle between the two sides of Nixon was reflected in the power struggle between Colson and Klein, one that, as the months went by, was obviously being won by Colson.” Indeed, Haldeman assistant Larry Higby knew that his friend Gordon Strachan joined the chief of staff’s unit from Klein’s because he saw the shift in power in the White House. To help control campaign manager John Mitchell’s operations at the Committee to Re-Elect the President (CREEP), headquartered across from the White House at 1701 Pennsylvania Avenue, Haldeman made his young aide Jeb Magruder the Deputy Director of Communications. The relatively inexperienced Magruder was thrown not only into a mess between Klein and Colson, but was called upon by the chief of staff to manage the apparatus and oversee the management of the various communications strategies, just short of throwing Klein overboard. It was clear that the president and Haldeman no longer believed the veteran communications man could get the job done on his own. Klein was reduced to a figurehead. Clumsily, Magruder tried to solve some of the coordination issues and manage affairs between Klein and Colson, but the president’s aggressive special counsel was having none of it. Over lunch in a posh Washington restaurant, Colson bullied Klein unmercifully, refused to compromise, and left Magruder fearful of what Colson would do next.¹⁶⁸

Such was the emerging dynamic within the White House as it inched toward the re-election in 1972. In many respects, it was a team only in the sense that it was unified in the singular goal of victory on Election Day. Strained and bruised internal relationships were the collateral damage of getting things done. Throughout the fight to come, the team’s demeanor was often one of “us against the world.” While their boss all but abandoned his fighting stance to assume the role of Oval Office statesman, the team prepared for strategic warfare on multiple battlegrounds in his name. Their loyalty, however, did not mean conformity, but more of a visceral and aggressive form of hardball that either left others on board, or bloody, watching from the sidelines. There was no room for compromise in a world filled with ever-new political

¹⁶⁷ Magruder, *An American Life*, 158-159. See also White, *The Making of the President, 1972*, 48-49; Safire, *Before the Fall*, 291; and White, *Breach of Faith*, 186-187.

¹⁶⁸ Magruder, *An American Life*, 76, 90, 108, 168. See also Ehrlichman, *Witness to Power*, 239; Safire, *Before the Fall*, 291; and White, *Breach of Faith*, 188-190. Indeed Colson had his own plans for reorganizing things and looked to the direction of former CIA agent E. Howard Hunt. Strachan, originally recruited by Nixon Deputy Assistant Dwight Chapin, became Haldeman’s liaison to CREEP in March 1971.

enemies. As Haldeman noted in his file, “the White House staff has got to be like a rock and not allow anybody to succeed in the constant attempt to divide us.”¹⁶⁹ With conflicting agendas, temperaments, and egos, the team struggled to keep its eye on the ultimate prize—their reputed constituency in the vast American heartland—the silent loyalists. Their only guide through the months to come was a combination of self-righteousness, bullishness, and an unrelenting drive to crush any obstacles to victory.

Driving much of the passion for the fight ahead were Pat Buchanan and Chuck Colson. Adding and stirring two large helpings of hard-headed pragmatism to their partisanship, they targeted their potential opponents with a strategic view to a kill. Buchanan had been setting small fires under the president chair in the Oval Office since the spring of 1971 concerning the political reality of Ed Muskie. As time wore on and Muskie inched up in the national polls, Buchanan was hammering the keys on his typewriter as if their political lives depended on it. “For some months now, PJB has been inundating the West Wing and elsewhere with a blizzard of memoranda, warning about the possibility of a Muskie sweep in the primaries and promenade to the nomination,” Buchanan wrote in a memo to the president. “What was possible before seems probable to me now—and only the Florida Primary stands in the way of the unpleasant scenario outlined below.” The worry was that Muskie was running neck-and-neck with the president in the polls. According to Buchanan, that meant danger.

Should Muskie roll up the primaries, defeat left, center and right opposition, remove all doubt that he is the party choice, roll into a Democratic convention, win on the first ballot, stick [New York Senator and Democratic nominee hopeful] John Lindsay on the ticket to excite young, poor and black—he could march out of that convention into a hailstorm of TV and press publicity that could give him a five-point lead over the President by mid-July 1972. That to me is not out of the question.¹⁷⁰

Even the old Nixon nemesis Ted Kennedy paled in comparison to the growing fear that Muskie wrought inside the hallways of the Nixon White House. By the middle of 1971, the team worried much less about Kennedy as polling suggested that the senator from Massachusetts’s reputation as a playboy, combined with his baggage from Chappaquiddick, made a successful run in 1972 unlikely. A Harris Poll conducted in June 1971 showed that Kennedy would lose in a divisive campaign. Pollster Lou Harris suggested that Kennedy “arouses bitter hostility or ardent support but rarely any lukewarm reactions.” What made Colson nervous about the poll was that in Harris’ opinion, “Muskie is a more viable opponent than Kennedy.”¹⁷¹ It confirmed what many had already thought. The reaction to Kennedy’s candidacy was almost more of a Nixonian conditioned, emotional response, but Muskie engendered hard-core, practical political concerns. In a March 24, 1971, memo to Richard Nixon, Buchanan suggested, “We ought to go down to the kennels and turn all the dogs loose on Ecology Ed. The President is the only one who should

¹⁶⁹ See Haldeman’s talking point of December 22, 1970, Haldeman Papers, Box 153, NARA. See also Nixon, *RN*, 496.

¹⁷⁰ Memorandum from Pat Buchanan to the President, January 13, 1972, Buchanan Papers, Box 2, NARA. Buchanan had collected the past several months of the Harris and Gallup polls, which are found in Box 1 and Box 2, NARA.

¹⁷¹ The team, including Colson, Haldeman, and Buchanan, liked the results of the poll if not the source. They were often wary of Harris because of his “support” for the Massachusetts Senator. Colson suggested to Haldeman that “I know that you don’t trust Harris; nor do I. I do think he is a better pollster than some give him credit for, however, and I am firmly convinced that he wants desperately to weasel his way in with us and that he honestly, for whatever motive, wants to see us re-elected.” See Memorandum from Charles Colson to H.R. Haldeman, June 25, 1971, WHSF, Contested Files, Box 3, Nixon Library.

stand clear, while everybody else gets chewed up. The rest of us are expendable commodities; but if the President goes, we all go, and maybe the country with us. My view.”¹⁷²

The dogs were ready. Buchanan knew it—everyone did. The animals were stretching their chains across the street at the Committee to Re-Elect the President, salivating, teeth bared, biting everything in sight, even each other, and it was indeed time to set them loose. But once set in motion, no one really had control over the extent of their ravages. Nonetheless, the political strategist understood that if Muskie was going to go down, the voters would need a strong helping hand. Buchanan thought that there were a few in the Democratic Party who also did not want to see Big Ed Muskie steal the show before the race had a chance to begin. It was crystal clear that the senator from Maine needed to be grabbed by the collar and dragged down into the dirt. “I cannot believe they view with any enthusiasm eight years of President Ed Muskie telling them what is good for America. No, I think some of these fellows would not be disappointed to see Big Ed unhorsed and lying in a ditch by the side of the road.”¹⁷³

Less than two months later on May 17, 1971, Nixon and aides, Kissinger, Haldeman, Ehrlichman, and Colson, set sail for an evening cruise on the presidential yacht the *Sequoia*. After the craft passed by Washington’s Tomb at Mount Vernon, Nixon and his men gathered in the wood paneled dining room, drank wine and scotch, dined on New York strip steak and corn on the cob, and plotted their political futures. While the yacht inched quietly down the darkening waters of the Potomac, Nixon looked ahead to 1972 and the battles that were to come against Congress and others over Vietnam and his domestic agenda. As the president nursed his wine, stroking the rim of the glass with a finger, he turned to his trusted political strategist Chuck Colson and said, “One day we will get them—we’ll get them on the ground where we want them. And we’ll stick our heels in, step on them hard and twist—right, Chuck, right?” Colson watched the president closely and listened intently to every word. Nixon told his men that they would get their enemies “on the floor and step on them, crush them, show no mercy.” Colson understood instinctively what his boss meant. Henry Kissinger “smiled and nodded,” and while Haldeman said nothing, “the look on his face was one of hand-rubbing expectation.” Colson was the only one who said a word. “I spoke for all three of us: ‘You’re right sir, we’ll get them.’” The obvious dissenter was John Ehrlichman, who “often a lonely voice of moderation, jerked his head back and stared at the ceiling.” Colson recognized it as a seminal moment and that the die had been struck for all that was to come. “And so on the *Sequoia* this balmy spring night, a Holy War was declared against the enemy,” Colson declared. The Nixonian enemies who had the temerity to oppose their “noble goals” would be dealt with ruthlessly. “*They* who differed with *us*, whatever their motives, must be vanquished. The seeds of destruction were by now already sown—not in them but in us.”¹⁷⁴

That was true of course. However, well before the long knives of the Ervin Committee cut into the soft—and surprisingly vulnerable—underbelly of the Nixon team in the darker days of 1974, the president’s men set upon those “enemies” to make haste with their political destruction, much like Colson had so grimly and succinctly put into words. In what was about to be unleashed upon the mild mannered Ed Muskie and, soon after, the hapless George McGovern was certainly war but none of it was anything near holy.

¹⁷² Memorandum from Pat Buchanan to Richard Nixon, March 24, 1971, Buchanan Papers, Box 2, NARA.

¹⁷³ Memorandum from Pat Buchanan to Richard Nixon, March 24, 1971, Buchanan Papers, Box 2, NARA.

¹⁷⁴ See Colson, *Born Again*, 40-44. Original emphasis.

CHAPTER 3

UNHORSEING BIG ED

He sure fooled me. I very much expected him to give a “flaming liberal speech,” but instead he chastised the liberals, essentially, for being too ideological In short, Muskie has probably made a central strategic decision to quit playing footsies with the far left...and that he would rather be the nominee without having to kiss up to the party leftists. . . . If Muskie wins the nomination, and if he keeps up the current line, he cannot be campaigned against as easily as some dewy-eyed radical.¹⁷⁵

It was Christmas and they were cutting down trees. December 26, 1971, North Vietnam, and the skies opened and the bombs fell like belated gifts. Some packages bore nametags etched in chalk: “It’s for you, Gook,” and “Merry Christmas, Charlie,” while the others were reserved for no one in particular.¹⁷⁶ In that season of giving, the United States launched the largest bombing raid on North Vietnam since November 1968. More than two hundred planes and jets were involved in the onslaught that lasted for several days. The timing of the air raids caught the special counsel to the president by surprise and screwed up the results of a national poll that Charles Colson wanted to use to show Richard Nixon in a favorable light on the eve of election year. Colson was gearing up for a good ride in the polls following what he believed was “a lot of good year-end stuff.” The carpet-bombing of another country proved to be inconvenient for the Massachusetts attorney. It “turned out to be a very bad call time-wise,” he wrote in a memo to H.R. Haldeman. “I obviously did not know that the bombing was going to be resumed during the week after Christmas.” The problem for Colson was that he believed the Harris Poll conducted from December 28 to January 4 was compromised by the news from Southeast Asia.¹⁷⁷

By the end of 1971, the vocal portion of the antiwar movement had lost much of its punch and public opinion was generally supportive of the Nixon administration’s handling of the war in Southeast Asia.¹⁷⁸ In some important ways, the war was no longer the defining national issue, at least not one that reached anything near the crippling level as it had with Nixon’s predecessor by early 1968. However, on the eve of election year, while ordinance rained down from the sky over Hanoi, the support of the “silent majority” that the president had asked for in 1969 was still silent and the national polls were making Nixon and his team more than nervous. The numbers were not encouraging: in a three-way race, Ed Muskie and Nixon were tied at 42 percent and George Wallace came in a distant third at 11 percent. More troubling was a two-man race, where Muskie bested Nixon 48 percent to 45 percent. The poll showed that the president would defeat Kennedy by 6 points with Wallace in the race, and 9 points with a head-to-head contest against Ted Kennedy. Muskie indeed was turning out to be a problem. This was especially evident in the gains in middle-income voters, white professionals and upper-middle class suburbanites. “Muskie,” warned Colson, “is the only Democrat who can make inroads with this group and whenever he does he surges ahead in the polls.” Humphrey and Kennedy, maintained Nixon’s

¹⁷⁵ Memorandum from Ken Khachigian to Pat Buchanan, October 7, 1971, written after Muskie addressed a Liberal party fundraiser. See the memo in WHSF, Contested Files, Box 48, Nixon Library.

¹⁷⁶ Author interview with Capt. James Martinez (retired), February 6, 2005.

¹⁷⁷ Democratic nominee George McGovern would later compare the Nixon administration’s bombing of Indochina to Hitler’s extermination of European Jews in World War II. See Memorandum from Charles Colson to Clark MacGregor, July 13, 1972, and copy of the Harris Poll, Colson Papers, Box 132, NARA.

¹⁷⁸ Although the president’s real opposition to the continuation of the war came from Congress, which threatened to cut off funding.

special counsel, were unable “to make a dent” among those coveted set of voters.¹⁷⁹ Going into election year, Nixon did not like what he read about his challenger in the media, especially in the pages of the *Washington Post*. The *Post*’s Tom Braden, for example, told his readers that heading into election year, Nixon was “a very beatable candidate,” as he had the highest “hostility rating,” while Muskie had the lowest.¹⁸⁰

Dealing with the specifics of President Nixon’s “Muskie problem” as a key element of the 1972 presidential election has not been given full treatment in Nixon historiography. While elements of the full frontal political assault are better known through works by J. Anthony Lukas, Bob Woodward and Carl Bernstein, Rick Perlstein, and Theodore White, the behind the scenes panic and hand wringing over Muskie and his comparison to the president has been largely neglected, sidelined by discussions of the department of dirty tricks that came to light as investigations into Watergate widened.¹⁸¹ Many of the Nixon administration’s election year efforts became a footnote to the skullduggery. The overall strategy to divide the Democrats and deliberately set up a radical to roast, thereby avoiding a “centrist” like Ed Muskie as part of the designed re-election effort, is largely absent in scholarship. The depth of fear concerning Muskie in the Nixon camp is also less known, a fear that was heightened by the team’s belief that its own boss did not compare well in terms of likeability and lacked the image of one with a ‘steady hand at the tiller.’¹⁸²

Fear was palatable in the White House as election year began. Chuck Colson was particularly troubled by Muskie as he saw the senator from Maine as the greatest threat to his coalition. Colson was widely seen as the architect of a “labor-ethnic-Catholic-Wallaceite” group of voters—a “new coalition” that had never really been a core part of the Republican Party. Colson pushed the president for aid for parochial schools, to voice support for the anti-abortion and anti-busing lobby, and to claim Wallace territory by appealing to conservatives and voting blocs in the south. Colson held that there was a new middle class, people who were “not fighting against the establishment but to protect it.” These “have-nots of the ‘30s” were “the haves of the ‘70s. They have their boats and suburban homes.”¹⁸³ In the election of 1972, Colson and others feared that Muskie was going to give them much more trouble with these voting blocs than Humphrey, Kennedy, and especially George McGovern. Indeed, there was much to support this trepidation, not the least of which was the senator from Maine’s background.

¹⁷⁹ Memorandum from Charles Colson to H.R. Haldeman, January 11, 1972, and copies of the Gallup and Harris Polls from November and December, 1971, WHSF, Contested Files, Box 3, Nixon Library.

¹⁸⁰ See the *Washington Post*, December 14, 1971 A15. See also Gallup Poll in the January 31, 1972 edition of the *Post*, A2, 69, where Nixon and Muskie are practically even at 43 to 42, with George Wallace as possible third-party candidate stood at 12 percent. The Gallup Poll of February 4 indicated the same result. See the *Washington Post* January 31, 1972, A4.

¹⁸¹ For example, Lukas’s, *Nightmare*, Woodward and Bernstein’s *All the President’s Men*, Perlstein’s *Nixonland*, and Theodore White’s *The Making of the President, 1972*, and *Breach of Faith*, all do a fine job providing a retelling of the covert assault on Ed Muskie, but not so much the story of the straight-ahead political problem the senator’s candidacy appeared to bring.

¹⁸² Journalists, namely J. Anthony Lukas and even presidential biographer and chronicler Theodore White, have actually looked into the Muskie affair with much greater detail than historians. Those historians who have covered the issue, including Herbert Parmet, Stanley Kutler, and Rick Perlstein, have not explored the depth of concern over Muskie in the Nixon camp going into the 1972 reelection campaign. In both cases, coverage is confined largely to discussions of dirty tricks rather than a political strategy and a fear of Muskie as a candidate in direct comparison with the president.

¹⁸³ Colson is quoted in the *Washington Post*, December 5, 1972, B1, B3.

Edmund Muskie was the product of a large Catholic family, a proud and hard-working Polish-American clan that raised six children and believed in the ethos of hard work and getting ahead. Muskie had the grades and became a scholarship student attending Bates College where he joined the debating team, played sports, and served on student council. The young Muskie worked throughout school serving as a waiter, toiling in a kitchen, and paying his dues as a dormitory assistant at the college to supplement his scholarship. Graduating in 1936, Muskie was accepted into Cornell University Law School. His law career was interrupted by the Second World War, and in 1942, he enlisted in the U.S. Navy, served in the Atlantic and Pacific theaters, and was promoted to the rank of Lieutenant. Muskie's political career was equally impressive, as he served as the Governor of Maine, and in Washington as a U.S. Senator and, later, in 1980, as Secretary of State. In 1968, he ran alongside Hubert Humphrey as the nominee for vice president of the United States. In government, Muskie chaired the Legislative Review Committee of the Democratic Policy Committee and co-chaired the National Study Commission on Water Pollution, sponsoring significant federal environmental protection laws, including the Clean Air Act of 1970 and the Clean Water Act of 1972. The steady, calm, Catholic war veteran who put himself through college by waiting tables was no Ted Kennedy, and he was certainly not, as Ken Khachigian suggested, "some dewy-eyed radical."¹⁸⁴ And so while the Air Force leveled villages and destroyed rice paddies half a world away, Nixon's team launched a multidimensional "bomb Muskie" operation to rub him out politically and make way for someone for whom the radical term could stick.

Before the smoke cleared from the flares Buchanan shot over the White House concerning the Muskie threat, Nixon and Haldeman had themselves become impatient to get things rolling. "We need some action on the bomb Muskie crew," Haldeman wrote in his nightly diary, "especially Agnew, he's got nothing to gain in fighting the press anymore, but he should brutally attack Muskie, leaving Hubert [Humphrey] and Teddy [Kennedy] alone for now, since Muskie's way out in front."¹⁸⁵ The next day, Haldeman fired off a memo to Buchanan, pushing him for progress with exactly the same line. "The President raised the question yesterday as to what's happening on the 'Bomb Muskie Crew.' He feels that all our speakers, including [Barry] Goldwater and especially the Vice President, should be steadily attacking Muskie now, hitting him on every point that he scores We should leave Humphrey and Kennedy alone for now."¹⁸⁶ Buchanan and Colson got moving. "We are activating the bomb-Muskie squad," the special counsel wrote in a memo to Haldeman soon after his directive. "In fact, we have had pretty good results with it this week." The positive results came from Republican warhorses—surrogates, including Goldwater, John Tower, Edward Gurney, and Bob Dole. The plan included the use of Vice President Spiro Agnew, believing his pursuit of Muskie would gain attention in the press highlighting the line that a Muskie presidency would be a disaster. Colson complained bitterly that even though Agnew had "hit Muskie very hard in a speech" (and there were plans for numerous appearances with the senator in the crosshairs in the coming days), journalists were shielding the senator from Maine by not covering the substance of their team's attacks. "I suspect because the media is protecting Muskie, some of the Vice President's good rhetoric has not

¹⁸⁴ Memorandum from Ken Khachigian to Pat Buchanan, October 7 1971, WHSF, Contested Files, Box 48, Nixon Library. Please also see the Historical Note backgrounder in the Edmund S. Muskie papers, Edmund S. Muskie Archives and Special Collections Library, Bates College.

¹⁸⁵ Haldeman, *Haldeman Diaries*, 395.

¹⁸⁶ Memorandum from H.R. Haldeman to Pat Buchanan, January 12, 1972, WHSF, Contested Files, Box 28, Nixon Library.

gotten into print.” Despite this disappointment, Colson knew that the best course of action was to stay after Muskie and make it the “number one priority here.”¹⁸⁷

According to Buchanan, Muskie’s growing profile was alarming, especially since the early campaign was based on some basic assumptions (many of which later proved to be correct). With Alabama Governor George Wallace’s specific intent still unclear, the political team believed that there would only be a 4 percent separation between parties, especially given the historical concerns from the “very close” elections of ’60 and ’68. The disappointing midterm campaign had made Nixon appear as “a partisan leader of a minority party” with little room to break out into the open for new voters. At issue was another operating assumption, that there was a “fundamental shift” among the electorate, chiefly a fracturing among the “New Deal Coalition” with declining support for the Democratic Party. It was not only Catholic voters, but, “in particular, southern whites, blue-collar urban ethnics and Jews,” who they believed would cross over to the president in 1972. Given the president’s experiences in the midterm elections, the plan was to avoid “over-exposure to the public as a candidate in a long campaign.” The immediate problem was not just the president’s image, his incumbency, nor was it a battle in the primaries; the problem was that Edmund Muskie could best take these voters away.¹⁸⁸ There was little doubt that the Nixon campaign team would have preferred to tangle with Humphrey and his baggage from the 1960s. As Buchanan enunciated, “were Humphrey the candidate . . . we could run the horror clippings of 1968, war, riots, coffins, urban violence, crime and say, this is the result of what Hubert Humphrey called the ‘politics of joy’ in 1968. Let’s not go back to the horrible year, 1968—let’s move forward with President Nixon.”¹⁸⁹

Muskie was a more elusive target to hit with the Vietnam War. Haldeman’s diary shows how the inner circle came out swinging in the dark, as he mused about how the World War II veteran could be tarred with the Democratic Party’s history with the 1960s and the Southeast Asian war. As Nixon’s chief of staff wrote, the issue was to show voters that Muskie belonged to the bunch that “stood silently by while we were getting into the war and the deaths were going up Who are you going to trust, the one who stood silently while we were getting in, and now criticizes the peace, or the one who said he would get us out and is doing so?” The upshot in Haldeman’s comparison was that “we’ve got to get over that we’re more for peace than they are.”¹⁹⁰

Notwithstanding this absurdity, the team struggled over exactly what to do with Muskie. The senator represented both the largest threat to their proposed coalition and the most difficult to paint into a radical corner. Getting distance between the president and the calm, rational, and steady looking Muskie had those in the White House scrambling for answers. The alarm was apparent in White House memorandums, many of which were striking in their candor. This was especially so in internal research done by staffer Doug Hallett. After reading Hallett’s results, Haldeman suggested to aide Larry Higby that polling was necessary on the issues he raised,

¹⁸⁷ Charles Colson to H.R. Haldeman, January 28, 1972, Colson Papers, Box 131, NARA. See also Colson’s memos from February 10 and February 18 concerning aid to parochial schools in Box 131. Colson and others worried about Muskie as a centrist who would appeal to Catholic voters more so than John Lindsay or McGovern who were considered more left wing. Muskie was not only a Catholic but was believed to be a centrist. See also memorandum from Charles Colson to H.R. Haldeman and John Ehrlichman April 4, 1972, Colson Papers, Box 131, and Colson to Parker, May 5, 1972, May 15 1972, and June 27, 1972, all found in Colson Papers, Box 131, NARA.

¹⁸⁸ Pat Buchanan’s “Critique of the 1972 Campaign” file, November 7, 1972, WHSF, Box 33, Nixon Library.

¹⁸⁹ Attack Organization and Strategy Memorandum from Pat Buchanan and Ken Khachigian to John Mitchell, March 14, 1972, Haldeman Papers, Box 97, NARA.

¹⁹⁰ Haldeman, *Haldeman Diaries*, 409.

including the not so flattering way their boss compared with Muskie:

In his analysis, Hallett makes the point that Muskie's public image is everything the President's is not: strong, reflective, prudent, even wise. The President on the other hand, is viewed as a man on the make, ashamed of and constantly running away from his past, manipulator, unsure of his convictions, tactician instead of strategist, grand vizier of all Rotarians, substituting pomposity for eloquence. Further, the American people do not think he has any broad conceptional [sic] framework or any sense of direction or purpose. These are arguable points and they should be pursued by some valid polling as soon as possible. In other words, we need to test the Nixon image versus the Muskie image against the hypothesis laid out by Hallett.¹⁹¹

While concern over the president's image was always chronic, Muskie's candidacy exacerbated this anxiety. The team understood that although a majority of Americans agreed with Nixon's policies, they were not always as confident in the way these messages were packaged and delivered, especially if they arrived via a "fist-waving" politician. Nixon's aides believed that their best move was to dress Nixon up with the brightest ribbon they could find, and that decoration came from the aura of the presidency. Buchanan, for example, was positive the team could best Muskie on the presidential role. "Whether or not they do, my guess is that the American public *wants* to trust their President," Nixon's strategist wrote. "Thus, we must once again make use of—the Nixon presence—the commodity which we monopolize in the campaign—the Presidency." Buchanan maintained that Muskie was no match for Nixon in appearing "presidential," and therefore, "every effort must be made to identify the White House with Richard Nixon—pressing the dignity and even the majesty of a political ambience that Edmund Muskie couldn't match in a million campaigns."¹⁹² Perhaps that was true, but Buchanan's bluster notwithstanding, Nixon's men feared that marshalling the president's uncertain charisma might not be enough to derail Muskie. The team was well aware of the emerging support of the establishment for the Maine senator. Chicago mayor Richard Daley compared Muskie to Nixon's old rival, suggesting the senator was "a man who is sincere and dedicated to moving the country ahead like the late John Kennedy was."¹⁹³ In the primaries to come, Muskie appeared ready to match Nixon not only in charisma but in generating the perfect storm, uniting the Democratic Party under a single banner. Staffer Steve Embry agreed. Writing to Ken Khachigian that same day, he suggested that Muskie was "the candidate with the greatest chance of uniting the Democratic Party and thus the toughest of the President's potential opponents."¹⁹⁴

Nixon's loyal inner circle needed an issue that would not only distract from the president's image problem but also take its opponent out at the knees. The point the team believed would hit home with Muskie concerned the Vietnam War. When the Democratic senator came out swinging against the administration's negotiations with Hanoi, Haldeman pounced. "Muskie's attack on our peace proposal is an opportunity for us to nail him hard on a number of fronts." The number one issue was to connect the senator to the former Democratic administration's policies and the Paris Peace Accords in November of 1968. Haldeman used the

¹⁹¹ Administratively Confidential Memorandum from H.R. Haldeman to Lawrence Higby, January 12, 1972, Haldeman Papers, Box 199, NARA.

¹⁹² Memorandum from Pat Buchanan to Ken Khachigian, January 13, 1972, WHSF, Contested Files, Box 48, Nixon Library.

¹⁹³ *The New York Times*, February 25, 1972, 22.

¹⁹⁴ Memorandum from Steve Embry to Ken Khachigian, January 13, 1972, Box 48, WHSF, Contested Files, Nixon Library.

old argument that it was unbelievable that “those who got us into this war are sabotaging the President’s efforts to get us out.” Haldeman suggested that Muskie secured a place on the ticket with Humphrey by supporting Johnson’s policy in Southeast Asia, a “policy [that] did not accomplish anything at the bargaining table in Paris except to agree on the shape of the table.”¹⁹⁵

Of course, Haldeman is completely disingenuous on this point, as he knew, or should have known, as well as anyone in the administration, that in 1968 Nixon campaign manager John Mitchell, and opportunist perhaps without par Henry Kissinger, helped to sabotage the Paris Peace Accords by promising at Nixon’s behest that Saigon would get a better deal with a Republican administration.¹⁹⁶ Swallowing this irony without missing a step, Nixon’s loyal chief of staff took the absurdity even further, suggesting to Colson and Scali that Muskie “attacks the plan and in effect tells the enemy not to negotiate with the obvious bait that if they don’t negotiate to end the war with Nixon they will get a better deal by waiting for Muskie.”¹⁹⁷ Perhaps it was obvious to Nixon’s chief of staff because that is akin to what his boss did to Hubert Humphrey in 1968, thereby destroying his party’s peace plank. Despite this, Haldeman baldly claimed that the “longer we wait the more people will be killed in Vietnam.”¹⁹⁸ Nevertheless, Haldeman suggested, “Muskie is muddled. He obviously has not done his homework.” But for the purposes of the attack team, it was really about politics not policy, and accuracy took a back seat to getting the right message out through Colson’s operation. The points were that Muskie rejected the president’s proposal “before the enemy rejects it”; he will give the enemy “aid and comfort” and “encouragement” and “surrender rather than settlement.” The main thrust and one that the team put forward quite effectively was that “Muskie is out of step with the majority of the American people.”¹⁹⁹

All of this was music to the ears of political strategists like Pat Buchanan who looked for any opportunity to attack. He was also the man who could put the case into words for the surrogates. Nixon was well aware of his speechwriter’s talents. On the same day that Haldeman sent his marching orders to Colson, the president sent a memo to Buchanan and his chief of staff on this subject: “I believe that Muskie’s attack on our peace proposal is an opportunity for us to nail him hard on a number of fronts. Buchanan is probably the only one who can write the talking points or speech to deal with this problem.”²⁰⁰ Nixon’s allusions to peacemaking aside, the team underneath him knew that Muskie was no ordinary political opponent. Memos that

¹⁹⁵ Memorandum from H.R. Haldeman to Chuck Colson and John Scali, February 2, 1972, Haldeman Papers, Box 199, NARA.

¹⁹⁶ See Christopher Hitchens, *The Trial of Henry Kissinger* (London: Verso, 2001), 6-18; and Robert “KC” Johnson, “Did Nixon Commit Treason in 1968? What the New LBJ Tapes Reveal,” January 26, 2009, George Mason University’s History News Network, <http://hnn.us/articles/60446.html>.

¹⁹⁷ Memorandum from H.R. Haldeman to Chuck Colson and John Scali, February 2, 1972, Haldeman Papers, Box 199, NARA. For a discussion of this issue, please see Clark Clifford, *Counsel to the President: A Memoir*, with Richard Holbrooke (New York: Random House), 1991; and Nixon, *RN*, 322-325, 336-337. Additionally, for Haldeman’s knowledge of the deep politics involved with strategy in Vietnam, see Haldeman, *Haldeman Diaries*, 221.

¹⁹⁸ In 1973, Nixon finally agreed to a peace deal with Hanoi on terms that were largely the same as those on the negotiation table in 1968, a period of time when an additional 20,000 American soldiers lost their lives. See Hitchens, *The Trial of Henry Kissinger*, 15.

¹⁹⁹ Memorandum from H.R. Haldeman to Chuck Colson and John Scali, February 2, 1972, Haldeman Papers, Box 199, NARA.

²⁰⁰ Memorandum from the President to Pat Buchanan and H.R. Haldeman, February 2, 1972, Buchanan Papers, Box 7, NARA. Then, repeating Haldeman, Nixon attacked Muskie for not being able to accomplish anything at the Paris Peace Conference in 1968 because he had the poor judgment to support the Johnson war policy; the result was that the best they could do in the French capital was “to agree on the shape of the table.”

included the president's desire to "nail" Muskie were the type of communications that were copied widely and appeared in numerous staff files. There is little doubt that such edicts trickled down through the entire reelection campaign and into the operational hands of small units, all working on their own angles and strategies, and looking for ways to derail Muskie with hard hitting speeches through growing surrogate operations, and the tricksters that were targeting him at the knee level out on the campaign trail.²⁰¹ But for all of the attack plans and the dirty tricks to come, Edmund Muskie played a significant role in crippling his own campaign.

The cracks began early for the Democratic contender when rival George McGovern made a surprisingly strong second-place showing in the Iowa caucuses. Even though Muskie won, his opponent gained national attention. While the Nixon team was delighted that McGovern left the rural state with momentum, what engendered broader smiles in the corridors outside the Oval Office took place in the New Hampshire snow. Although Muskie captured the state's primary, the victory came at a tremendous cost, when the Nixon team got a helping hand from a Manchester newspaper. Although it is arguable the degree to which dirty tricks affected Muskie's primary hopes, one "trick" in particular became notorious, even though its effect on the campaign is questionable. On Thursday February 24, two weeks before the state's primary, a letter to William Loeb, the fiery conservative publisher of the Manchester *Union-Leader* appeared in the right wing newspaper. Loeb presented the letter as part of a scathing editorial, which expounded on text suggesting that the senator disparaged French-Canadians and their descendants populating the northern part of the state while on a campaign stop in Florida. Loeb suggested that if it were not for the letter writer, "no one in New Hampshire would know of the derogatory remarks emanating from the Muskie camp about the Franco-Americans in New Hampshire and Maine—remarks which the senator found amusing." Loeb said that the communication from a Paul Morrison from Deerfield Beach, Florida, which came to be known as the "Canuck letter," confirmed to him and others that the senator was "a hypocrite."²⁰² Muskie countered that the contents of the letter were complete lies. It was not the letter, however, that set Muskie ablaze; rather, what drew Muskie into a fight was a story in the publication's Friday edition. That day, Loeb ran an attack on the senator's wife, Jane, impugning her character, suggesting that on the campaign trail she was a foul-mouthed drunk. Muskie could have let it go, winning the state and then moving on, forgetting about the letter that would have mattered little anywhere else in the nation, leaving Loeb's body blows behind him. But instead the candidate decided to defend his wife.²⁰³

While Richard Nixon was half-way around the world playing international statesman for a historic meeting with Chinese leader Mao Zedong, Ed Muskie climbed aboard a flatbed truck outside the offices of the Manchester *Union-Leader*. That Saturday morning with a heavy snow pounding the streets, the Democratic hopeful, microphone in hand, made a passionate denunciation of Loeb and a stirring defense of his wife. With a few hundred souls in winter coats packed up against the edge of the makeshift stage, Muskie called Loeb a "gutless coward" who had insulted his wife. "This man doesn't walk, he crawls. It's fortunate for him he's not on this platform beside me." Commentators in the media, though, concluded that it was a bit too emotional, and reported widely that Muskie had broken down and sobbed during his speech.

²⁰¹ Lukas, *Nightmare*, 159, 398.

²⁰² The *New York Times*, February 27, 1972, 1. See also description in the *Washington Post*, February 27, 1972, A1, A8.

²⁰³ The *Washington Post*, February 27, 1972, A1, A8. See also the *New York Times*, February 27, 1972, 1, and Perlstein, *Nixonland*, 609-610.

David Broder's first line in his column in the *Washington Post* the following morning told readers all they needed to know about what the speech meant. Broder wrote that Muskie's defense was delivered "With tears streaming down his face and his voice choked with emotion . . . In defending his wife, Muskie broke down three times in as many minutes—uttering a few words and then standing silent in the near blizzard, rubbing at his face, his shoulders heaving, while he attempted to regain his composure sufficiently to speak." Loeb, unfazed by Muskie's outburst, saw the "weeping" for the political blunder it was. The publisher said that the senator had made "a very serious tactical error. I think that Sen. Muskie's excited and near-hysterical performance this morning again indicates he's not the man that many of us want to have his finger on the nuclear button."²⁰⁴ The senator and World War II veteran from Maine countered that his voice only cracked from anger and that snowflakes were in his eyes, not tears.²⁰⁵

The cracks, however, began to appear in the Muskie campaign's internal polls. Even though he beat McGovern 46 to 37 percent, his handlers had earlier predicted that they would capture 50 percent of the New Hampshire Democratic vote, and it appeared to some that McGovern looked strong while Muskie appeared weak. This reality did not escape McGovern's notice. "Even if he claims victory, as he will," the senator from South Dakota told the media following the primary, "it's not the sort of victory he imagined."²⁰⁶ The media loved this weepy political story. As historian Rick Perlstein observed, journalists "had begun circling Muskie like buzzards."²⁰⁷ Voters were turned off as much by "senatorial tears shed in a snowstorm on a flatbed truck" as they were by the Canuck letter, which received much more attention and blame for why Muskie's ship started to go down.²⁰⁸ Muskie appeared undaunted by McGovern's showing, maintaining that "Senator McGovern says I won by a razor-thin margin. If I were Senator McGovern I wouldn't try to shave with that razor."²⁰⁹ As Muskie's strength came from his image as a calm and rational politician in contrast to the often-bellacose Nixon, the media attention left his candidacy bloodied early on in the race.²¹⁰

Although Nixon's reelection campaign machinery operating out of CREEP headquarters at 1701 Pennsylvania Avenue carried out a litany of activities trying to disrupt Muskie along the election trail, the effect has been over-emphasized in accounting for Muskie's fall.²¹¹ The legendary Canuck letter was no different. What helps explain this development was that its origins tracked back to the larger story of Watergate. The connection to the campaign first emerged in October 1972 when *Washington Post* writer Marilyn Berger told colleague David Broder that White House staffer (and former *Post* writer) Ken Clawson was the letter's author. Broder urged Berger to bring her story to Carl Bernstein and Bob Woodward. The two reporters, then hard on the heels of the Watergate break-in, revealed the "Canuck letter" as part of a sweeping campaign of Nixon campaign sabotage.²¹² Muskie believed that "somebody was out to

²⁰⁴ The *Washington Post*, February 27, 1972, A1, A8. See also the *New York Times*, February 27, 1972, 1, and Haldeman, *Haldeman Diaries*, 422.

²⁰⁵ See the *New York Times*, February 29, 1972, 22.

²⁰⁶ See polling data in the *New York Times*, March 5, 1972, 34, E1; and March 8, 1972, 1, 26.

²⁰⁷ See Perlstein, *Nixonland*, 628-629.

²⁰⁸ Please see Joseph Alsop's column in the *Washington Post*, March 6, 1972, A21.

²⁰⁹ The *New York Times*, March 8, 1972, 1, 26.

²¹⁰ White, *The Making of the President 1972*, 81-82. See also Haldeman, *Haldeman Diaries*, 426-427.

²¹¹ Please see Lukas, *Nightmare*, 155-166; Bernstein and Woodward's *All the President's Men*, 112-130, 135-158, 201-204, 218-219, 245, 251-253; Perlstein, *Nixonland*, 630-637; Fred Emery, *Watergate*, 96, 105-107; Drew, *Richard M. Nixon*, 104-105.

²¹² Please see Bernstein and Woodward's *All the President's Men*, 112-130, 135-158, 201-204, 218-219, 245, 251-253.

ambush us,” especially as along the campaign trail letters and facsimiles purporting to be from Muskie’s senate office were sent out attacking fellow Democrats. Polling data disappeared, fake phone calls from those claiming to represent the Muskie campaign bothered voters in their homes, and phony campaign flyers appeared in their mailboxes bearing the senator’s name. From the fall of 1971 to the spring of 1972, Donald Segretti traveled through 20 states with political sabotage as his main goal. One young woman was paid \$20 to strip and run outside Muskie’s hotel room yelling, “I love Ed Muskie”; posters that read, “Help Muskie in busing more children now” went up in Southern states; and invitations to non-existent events claiming free food and alcohol were distributed to black neighborhoods in Milwaukee, Wisconsin. Segretti was also responsible for fabricating a letter on Muskie’s letterhead indicating that Humphrey and Henry Jackson were involved in sexual misconduct.²¹³

The efforts were part of a program called “ratfucking,” a slang for political sabotage, and one that Chapin’s buddy Segretti and others turned into a crude art during the early days of the campaign. The plan was to disrupt and divide the Democrats by having them bicker over the others’ political tactics. Phone lines were jammed, speeches were pilfered, meetings were cancelled, campaigns were spied upon, food was ordered and delivered to puzzled campaign workers and fake rioters turned up at political events. In early 1972, such activities constituted a bizarre contrast: while Nixon was undertaking historical diplomatic trips to the Soviet Union and China, his men were burglarizing offices in the Watergate complex and “sending unordered pizzas to Muskie.” It was also a classic case where the right hand did not always know where the left hand had been. As J. Anthony Lukas pointed out, “Every faction in the White House and CREEP seemed determined to have its own undercover network. There were at least four other parallel operations.” One of these was run by Segretti out of CREEP; the second by E. Howard Hunt; a third by Murray Chotiner; and a fourth by Jeb Magruder.²¹⁴ There can be little doubt that Berger’s contention that Clawson told her he authored the infamous Canuck letter was true, even though he later denied it. Such an act was consistent not only with all of the other activities the team did admit to, but the letter’s purported writer, Paul Morrison of Deerfield Beach, Florida, was never located.²¹⁵

Despite these high and low-level shenanigans, there is little evidence that the fabricated letters or any of the other activities had any beneficial effect at the ballot box for the Nixon administration. What they did accomplish was to embolden Muskie’s political enemies, including William Loeb, to go fishing after the candidate and get him to bite on a bit of New Hampshire bait. The immediate winner leaving the state then was not Edmund Muskie or Richard Nixon but George McGovern. Even though Muskie topped the senator from South Dakota 46 percent to 37 percent, his campaign had certainly hoped for a wider margin and momentum heading out. “It’s heartbreaking,” admitted one of Muskie’s campaign coordinators. The strong second-place finish provided McGovern with a boost of new energy heading down into Florida. As he told reporters, Muskie was a “frontrunner with a very shaky base.”²¹⁶ This base was increasingly torn between the underdog McGovern and a vulnerable Muskie who was attempting to clarify his position on the Vietnam War and prevent defections to the McGovern

²¹³ Lukas, *Nightmare*, 157-158. See also Jaworski, *The Right and the Power*, 46.

²¹⁴ Lukas, *Nightmare*, 159-162, 398. See also Perlstein, *Nixonland*, 630-637, 651, 671, 741.

²¹⁵ See the discussion of this point in Woodward and Bernstein, *All the President’s Men*, 127-129, 134-142, 285-286, 328. See also Perlstein, *Nixonland*, 629-632-635.

²¹⁶ McGovern is quoted in the *New York Times*, March 9, 1972, 32. See also the *New York Times*, March 8, 1972, 1, 26; the *Washington Post*, March 5, 1972, A1, A20; and Haldeman, *Haldeman Diaries*, 430.

insurgency, while not alienating those in the center of the political spectrum. As the *Washington Post*'s David Broder suggested, "What these liberals have perceived about Muskie is that his style may be low-keyed and noninflammatory, but his positions are now very much in line with their own. He has begun to condemn the war, not just as a political mistake, but as a moral wrong; his rhetoric on domestic issues has shifted from the standard Democratic call for bigger government and higher benefits to the 'redistribution of wealth and power.'"²¹⁷

For the Nixon team, the primary showed that Muskie may not have been the dangerous opponent it had made him out to be. However, by mid March, there was a growing concern that the "several quasi-independent attack operations" needed to be coordinated under a central authority to direct the effort against Muskie in a more professional and consistent manner. The goal was to mitigate sloppiness and "avoid the problem of the right hand not knowing what the left is doing."²¹⁸ Buchanan and Khachigian were to try to take control over tactic development as well as oversee general strategic aims, while the staff at CREEP would assist by checking on the effectiveness of their operations in the media, aid in negative advertising, help in the drafting of speeches for major events, and contributing to the production of covert materials. The consensus was to get a member from the White House staff over to CREEP headquarters at 1701 Pennsylvania Avenue to coordinate all the attack mechanisms, including "Gordon Liddy on his special projects." With a White House man at 1701, the plan was that they would have the ability to "turn lines on and off almost instantaneously." The member would also coordinate all the attack mechanisms outside 1701, including information from the Republican National Committee's (RNC) answer desk and "Colson's own White House operation."²¹⁹

Because Muskie appeared to be wounded early, Nixon's men believed the senator could be lumped in with Ted Kennedy, as someone especially 'feeble' on national defense. "Muskie's and Kennedy's records [on approving weapons systems] are atrocious," Buchanan and Khachigian wrote in an Attack Organization and Strategy memorandum to John Mitchell. "Senator Muskie voted to strip America's defenses below the danger point."²²⁰ The sight of Muskie's blood also emboldened others in attacking the senator, as even long-shot candidate Eugene McCarthy was encouraged by the attacks and began to take a run at his fellow Democrat, looking to eke out a win in Illinois. As the presumed frontrunner, Muskie had become a moving and wounded target.²²¹ The senator was also not the only party "centrist" heading into Florida, as his apparent vulnerability allowed him to become squeezed by the moderate Hubert Humphrey on one side and energized McGovern on the other. Humphrey, who was attempting his third run at the presidency, believed that if he fell short of second place in the Sunshine State his chances at the Oval Office would be over. "This is it for me," Humphrey said heading into the primary. "It's now or never. I don't want to be some rerun on the late show."²²²

Lacking momentum, any support Muskie did have in the South waned, and the senator's attacks on George Wallace increased in their shrillness. The result was that Nixon's team was

²¹⁷ See the *Washington Post*, February 6, 1972, B1.

²¹⁸ Memorandum from Pat Buchanan and Ken Khachigian to John Mitchell, March 14, 1972, Haldeman Papers, Box 97, NARA.

²¹⁹ See memorandum from Pat Buchanan and Ken Khachigian to John Mitchell, March 14, 1972. See also Jeb Magruder to John Mitchell, April 20, 1972; and Fred Malek to H.R. Haldeman, May 15, 1972, all found in Haldeman Papers, Box 97, NARA.

²²⁰ Attack Organization and Strategy Memorandum, from Pat Buchanan and Ken Khachigian to John Mitchell, March 14, 1972, Haldeman Papers, Box 97, NARA.

²²¹ The *Washington Post*, March 6, 1972, A21.

²²² Please see the *New York Times*, March 12, 1972, 43. See also March 16, 1972, 47.

given an opportunity to sick its attack dog Spiro Agnew on the Democratic frontrunner. The message was that unlike Richard Nixon, Muskie did not understand the South. The issue came to a head when Muskie finished fourth in the Florida primary, capturing only 9 percent of the vote compared to Wallace's 42 percent. Muskie referred to Wallace as "a demagogue of the worst kind," someone who "threatened the nobility of our country." Using the agreed upon strategy of taking the side of the American people against these sorts of "elitist" attacks, Agnew was taken off his leash and he promptly pounced. In regard to Wallace's victory, the vice president suggested, "It seems to me that in our system of politics, when a man wins an election in such an overpowering fashion, he should at least be acknowledged as someone who has struck a chord among the people and not be referred to as a demagogue." Agnew stated that Muskie missed the point and did not understand the issues the people cared about. "Now, if this is true, something that Mr. Wallace was saying must have struck a responsive chord," which was not only code for contentious issues such as school busing, but as the Nixon team had thought, general fear and frustration in the heartland over the nation's direction. The president's inner circle had begun to understand that disaffected voters were not merely "Wallace voters" but were indeed up for grabs. The task was to appear to be an administration that spoke the language this alienated constituency wanted to hear. It was something that Tom Wicker had put his finger upon in the *New York Times*. "But beyond busing, the point the Wallace vote has most clearly made is that a large and heterogeneous group of Americans are simply fed up with the ways things are going in their country," Wicker wrote. The more salient point was that "no one has found a way to focus its energies constructively and progressively" to capture this alienated constituency and "Wallace will ride high" until someone does.²²³

The internal White House memorandums make it clear that the Nixon team both recognized this reality and intended to go after these disaffected voters during the 1972 presidential election. They also believed that Wallace would eventually lose his footing nationwide and their party would be best positioned to swoop in and collect the disaffected, especially with a fractured Democratic Party led by a 'radical' like McGovern. Nixon's men had kept tabs on the inside of the Wallace camp, and the word was "don't worry about Wallace." As Buchanan had suggested to Haldeman, "From an excellent source in Alabama comes word that Governor Wallace is 'getting psychotic,' that he has serious marital problems and that he is 'not what he used to be.'"²²⁴

As the primaries moved from the balmy southern sunshine into the Midwest, the strain on Muskie amplified, and increasingly he looked incapable of capturing that disaffected constituency. A new Gallup Poll showed that Humphrey had passed Muskie 35 percent to 28 percent after the second week in March. While Humphrey decided to bypass Illinois and focus on Wisconsin, a possible McGovern insurgency loomed. McGovern set the bar low in Illinois, claiming in the days before the primary that 30 percent support was his target, as he joined with Humphrey in focusing on Wisconsin. With Eugene McCarthy left to battle with Muskie,²²⁵ the senator from Maine captured Illinois, 63 percent to 37 percent. Humphrey led both Muskie and McGovern in the polls heading into Wisconsin, further splitting the middle vote. The veteran

²²³ Agnew, Muskie, and Wicker are all quoted in the *New York Times*, March 16, 1972, 31.

²²⁴ See memorandum from Pat Buchanan to H.R. Haldeman, January 14, 1972, WHSF, Contested Files, Box 7, Nixon Library. For more on the team's belief that Wallace was not a threat in 1972, see also memorandum from Charles Colson to H.R. Haldeman, January 11, 1972, WHSF, Contested Files, Box 3, Nixon Library; the *Washington Post*, September 25, 1970, A25; memorandum to the President from Dick Howard, October 21, 1972, Howard Papers, Box 23, NARA; Ehrlichman, *Witness to Power*, 187; and May, *Campaign '72*, 65.

²²⁵ Please see Gallup polling in the *New York Times*, March 16, 1972, 30; and March 19, 1972, 40.

Minnesota politician had actually gained a slight lead in the Badger State less than two weeks before the primary. Meanwhile, the vice president kept up the attacks on the leaders, suggesting that they were “as wrong as it is possible for a human being to get without attracting the attention of the medical profession.”²²⁶

With Muskie on the ropes, anticipation grew within the Nixon camp. State polling indicated the prospect of a win for McGovern in Wisconsin, with Muskie possibly coming in fourth or fifth.” According to Buchanan, such an occurrence would “be a climatic disaster for Big Ed.” In a memorandum to the president, the speechwriter wrote that if this were the case, “Muskie would sustain a near fatal blow.” Buchanan as usual wanted a clearer picture of McGovern’s chances in the state, and if they proved good, the team should devote material efforts to the cause. The plan included getting Republicans out to cast ballots for McGovern. As the political strategist noted for the president, “if we have some hard poll information, and this is a possibility, then we should have Republicans cross over and vote for George McGovern. Word should go forth today.”²²⁷

By April, however, the president had become anxious that his men were not going hard enough after Muskie, and he was on his chief of staff’s back over the issue. “Got into political discussions, the P’s concerned that we’ve got to get moving on the attack, that we should have someone attacking Muskie as a defeatist, because he’s saying that we shouldn’t react to the Vietnam attack by the enemy,” Haldeman wrote in his diary. “We shouldn’t let him build that line about just getting out of Vietnam.”²²⁸ And there were reasons for this concern inside the Oval Office, as the internal memorandums spoke to a sense of fear rather than confidence. Those the team brought in from the outside for help in understanding the political mood only reinforced this trepidation. In a memorandum prepared for the administration, public opinion analyst Lloyd Free commented quite bluntly on the president’s prospects for the fall. “You have asked for my views about the President’s prospects; I shall give them to you with complete frankness. Despite the current Harris poll which shows Nixon comfortably ahead of Muskie, I would estimate the President’s chances of reelection in November as being no better than 50-50.” Free’s advice for the team was “to talk consistently like an ideological conservative; to act consistently and vigorously, with constant follow through, as an operational liberal.”²²⁹

Colson and Buchanan claimed never to trust the polls anyway, especially when they shifted suddenly. The president’s special counsel and his hardnosed speechwriter were seldom mollified and this reality contributed to the chronic belief in imminent political doom. When pollster Lou Harris warned in conversation with Colson that the president and his team should avoid “stridency” and crass partisanship, Buchanan suggested to Colson that he “would not trust

²²⁶ Agnew is quoted in the *New York Times*, March 26, 1972, 103. Please also see the campaign coverage and polling data in the *New York Times*, March 6, 1972, 24; March 22, 1972, 1, 32; and March 23, 1972, 32.

²²⁷ Memorandum from Pat Buchanan to the President, March 29, 1972, and relevant state polling data from March, Box 30, Nixon Library.

²²⁸ Haldeman, *Haldeman Diaries*, 435.

²²⁹ See memorandum and attached file from Jeb Magruder to H.R. Haldeman, April 3, 1972, WHSF, Contested Files, Box 32, Nixon Library. Additionally, the team was worried about playing the Vietnam card too heavily with Muskie. As the *Washington Post*’s David Broder told his readers, “[Nixon] has elevated Muskie into major national prominence on an issue on which Muskie can hardly lose: The desire to bring a quick end to the American involvement in Vietnam.” See the *Post*, February 15, 1972, A19.

Harris so far as one could throw him. He has long been, in Teddy White's phrase, a 'Kennedy fanatic.'²³⁰

In the Wisconsin primary on April 4, Muskie matched his fourth place in Florida. Finishing behind winner George McGovern, Humphrey and Wallace were in a virtual dead heat in second place. Wallace was the biggest surprise, gaining more votes in the northern state, besting Muskie by ten percentage points. Long shot candidates, New York Mayor John Lindsay and Senator Henry Jackson, trailed in the basement.²³¹ After the vote, Lindsay withdrew from the race. Becoming aware of the growing numbers of the politically disaffected in the nation, McGovern and Wallace both played to that constituency or as Tom Wicker pointed out, to those who "believe instinctively that loopholes and favoritism are a prime reason why the rich get richer and the poor get audited."²³² The big change after the two disastrous fourth-place finishes was that Muskie's one time lead over Richard Nixon had evaporated. Indeed, even before the Wisconsin vote, polls on March 24 and March 27 showed Muskie trailing the president by 10 points, compared with the spring of 1971, where a Harris poll showed Nixon behind with a projection that the president would lose 47 to 39 in 1972. A weary Muskie delivered a pep talk to approximately one hundred of his campaign workers and volunteers, claiming he was going to "work like hell" and focus on the states where he could capture the most delegates, namely Pennsylvania and Massachusetts on April 25, Ohio on May 2, California on June 6, and New York on June 20.²³³

As Muskie continued to bleed out on the campaign trail, Nixon's men quietly applauded the gains made by George McGovern. The South Dakotan was knocking off his Democratic rivals one-by-one in the primaries, and no one was more pleased than those inside the walls of the White House. This was especially the case following McGovern's win in Wisconsin. "The Democratic presidential candidates discombobulated themselves further in Wisconsin," Harry Dent wrote to the president. According to the communications man, the "big news" included "the McGovern and Wallace scores, HHH's failure to win, Muskie's fourth place disaster, and Lindsay's withdrawal." What really rallied the troops, though, was Muskie's poor showing, with both glee and derision to be found in abundance in the corridors outside the Oval Office. As Dent suggested to the president, "In the last four days Muskie virtually gave up, spending too much time watching pro basketball."²³⁴ Late that night, Haldeman summed up the momentous occasion inside the Nixon camp. "Everybody was highly pleased with the Wisconsin primary results," wrote the White House chief of staff. McGovern's wide margin of victory according to Haldeman, "thoroughly screws up the Democrats one more time."²³⁵

Each Muskie fall was seen not merely as a victory for McGovern but a win for Nixon. The next to fall for the politician from Maine was Massachusetts. McGovern won the state primary by 30 points over Muskie, with Humphrey coming in third, and Wallace dropping back to fourth. In Pennsylvania, Muskie lost again, this time to Humphrey; there were those in his campaign who wondered if there was any point going on to Ohio, especially as Muskie appeared "increasingly doleful with each campaign appearance." As R.W. Apple wrote in the *New York Times*, for Muskie, the former front-runner, April was not "the cruelest month," it was a

²³⁰Memorandum from Pat Buchanan to Charles Colson, April 17, 1972, WHSF, Contested Files, Box 1, Nixon Library. See also Dallek, *Nixon and Kissinger*, 428, 430, 432.

²³¹The *New York Times*, April 5, 1972, 1, 32.

²³²The *New York Times*, April 6, 1972, 1, 43. See also April 10, 1972, 30.

²³³The *New York Times*, April 10, 1972, 30. See also April 11, 1972, 41.

²³⁴Memorandum from Harry S. Dent to the President, April 5, 1972, POF, Box 17, NARA.

²³⁵Haldeman, *Haldeman Diaries*, 435.

“wasteland.”²³⁶

Although Nixon’s historic trip to China did not help Muskie’s numbers against the president, it did not make an appreciable difference to the outcome. Before the president’s trip, a Harris Poll found that Nixon led Muskie by four points, 44 to 40 with Wallace at 11 percent.²³⁷ What really hurt Muskie was not the statesman in China but a crowded Democratic field that smelled blood on the leader. While the president was away, the battle had intensified between Democratic candidates and Hubert Humphrey assumed the lead over Muskie, 35-28 percent.²³⁸ A Wisconsin poll less than two weeks later showed an even more fractured Democratic group with McGovern at 24 percent, Humphrey at 19 percent, Muskie at 15 percent, and Wallace at 12 percent.²³⁹ A Gallup Poll taken from March 24-27 following the China trip showed that head to head, Nixon held a 46-36 percent lead over Muskie, and in a match up with Humphrey and Wallace, Nixon would capture 46 to Humphrey’s 35 percent, with Wallace at 15 percent.²⁴⁰ The boost from the diplomatic venture was not all that impressive as while Nixon had opened up a 10 point lead from 4 points before the trip to China on Muskie, he had only moved up by 2 percentage points from 44 to 46 overall. What had occurred was that Muskie lost ground against the Democratic field due to his own failings in New Hampshire and in the states in the South and the Midwest following that episode, not to Nixon directly. Muskie had lost 4 points after a bad two week showing. And while the president’s approval rating had jumped to 56 percent, his highest in 14 months following his foreign policy successes, in actuality, Nixon’s rating had steadily climbed before his trip to China, from 49 percent in January to 53 percent in early February (before China) and then three more percentage points by early March to 56 percent.²⁴¹

By May, a Harris poll indicated the peace efforts had brought Nixon public acclaim. The president’s plan to visit Moscow and the trip to China had helped, as 55 percent of Americans thought it would bring substantial long-term agreements with the Russians, and 62 percent believed that it would lead to real agreements with China. Back in April, Americans had approved of the president making the trip to Moscow by a percentage point difference of 74-13, while 73 percent agreed with him going to China.²⁴² These results, though, had little to do with what happened to Muskie on the campaign trail. On April 27, Big Ed Muskie abandoned his active pursuit of his party’s nomination when he officially suspended his campaign. The senator admitted “I do not have the money to continue.” While suggesting that he was not dropping out completely, the decision effectively ended his run for the presidency, much to the delight of those in the Nixon White House. In many ways, Muskie was a paper tiger, never really finding his footing on the campaign trail. He generated little passion; looking weak and indecisive, he failed to gain traction once the primaries began. Even when he looked for a fight in the snow in New Hampshire, the senator never looked less presidential, a far cry from the man who bested

²³⁶ The *New York Times*, April 27, 1972, 1, 32, 42-43.

²³⁷ See Harris Poll, the *Washington Post*, March 7, 1972, A10.

²³⁸ See Harris Poll, the *Washington Post*, March 19, 1972, A3.

²³⁹ See polling data, the *Washington Post*, March 30, 1972, A1.

²⁴⁰ See Gallup Poll, the *Washington Post*, April 10, 1972, A2.

²⁴¹ See the *Washington Post*, March 9, 1972, A2. Americans were generally approving of the trip. When asked in this poll if the China trip would improve chances for world peace, 18 percent indicated very, 50 percent indicated fairly, 24 percent replied not at all, and 8 percent had no opinion. See the *Washington Post*, March 9, 1972, A2.

²⁴² See Harris polling, the *Washington Post*, May 18, 1972, A31. On May 22, Nixon became the first American president to visit Moscow. On May 26, Nixon and General Secretary of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union, Leonid Brezhnev, signed the SALT I treaty and the Anti-Ballistic Missile Treaty in Moscow. See Ambrose, *The Triumph of a Politician*, 203, 225, 252, 288, 313-314, 441-444, 545-550. That same day, the plumbers staged the first break-in attempt in the Watergate.

Nixon on television on the eve of the 1970 midterm elections when everything looked bright for Muskie and dark for Richard Nixon.²⁴³ While the president's men certainly played their share of dirty tricks against the senator, it appears that Ed Muskie unhorsed himself.

What the Muskie episode did expose was the level of concern inside the Nixon camp that a "centrist" politician could steal the constituency that the president and his team had planned to capture. They were the votes they largely did not get in 1968: moderate Democrats, Wallace supporters, Catholics, labor, Jews, and the growing suburban neighborhoods populated by the so called white ethnic voters. With the Muskie threat neutralized, the president's immediate concern had turned to Ted Kennedy. Rumors abounded that Kennedy would endorse McGovern, and the pressure on the senator from Massachusetts to make a decision began to build with each passing day. As a Kennedy spokesperson indicated, "He's said all along he did not expect to make any endorsement before the convention and that has not changed."²⁴⁴

Meanwhile George McGovern progressively built a lead over Humphrey in delegates and money raised through the month of May.²⁴⁵ By then, McGovern looked unbeatable. "I don't see how anybody can stop him," one national party leader said. An early effort to block the rising McGovern tide, ostensibly led by Governor Jimmy Carter of Georgia and other Southern governors, fell flat.²⁴⁶ Even though by the end of May it looked to many inside the Nixon political camp that McGovern was taking a stranglehold on the nomination, the underbelly of that peculiar campaign continued unabated, as on the 28th of that month, electronic surveillance equipment was installed inside Democratic National Committee headquarters in the Watergate. While a "stop McGovern" movement began in vain, President Nixon remained concerned about Kennedy coming out of the blue to grab the nomination and threaten the continuation of his presidency. As Nixon suggested to John Mitchell, "...from a number of sources it is becoming apparent that a last-ditch effort may be made by Kennedy to try to have a deadlock so that Kennedy could still get the nomination." The fact that Kennedy had already given up his Secret Service protection did not relieve the president's anxiety, suggesting that the senator might be up to some political posturing tricks. As Nixon suggested, "...that might just be a ploy for the purpose of playing that game."²⁴⁷

Nixon was not alone in his belief that Kennedy had serious designs on the presidency in '72. "It's a funny thing," Nixon nemesis and Democratic Party Chairman, Larry O'Brien, said. "Here in Washington we all assume Kennedy is not going to run; we don't even talk about it anymore. But every time I get out into the country, the first question I get asked is, 'What about Teddy?'"²⁴⁸ Watergate prosecutor Leon Jaworski believed that much of Nixon's paranoia about Kennedy and other political foes that could potentially come out of the dark to take him under, stemmed from his political career. In the election of 1968, despite earlier polls showing Nixon considerably out in front in the campaign's final days, challenger Hubert Humphrey suddenly

²⁴³ Muskie is quoted in the *New York Times*, April 28, 1972, 32, 1, 22. See also Lukas, *Nightmare*, 165.

²⁴⁴ *New York Times*, April 29, 1972, 1, 12, 31. See also, Perlstein, *Nixonland*, 672.

²⁴⁵ Please see the extensive coverage of the race in the *New York Times*, May 4, 1972, 41; May 7, 1972, 50; May 9, 1972, 24; May 11, 1972, 38; May 17, 1972, 30, May 25, 1972, 1, 50. For a White House insider overview, see also the strategic memo of May 24 prepared by the November Group, and the memorandum from Jeb Magruder to H.R. Haldeman, May 24, 1972, WHSF, Contested Files, Box 34, Nixon Library.

²⁴⁶ The *New York Times*, June 5, 1972, 26.

²⁴⁷ Eyes Only Memorandum from the President to John Mitchell, June 6, 1972, WHSF, Contested Files, Box 50, Nixon Library.

²⁴⁸ The *Washington Post*, November 2, 1971, A15. A Harris Poll in late June actually showed that Kennedy would run best against Nixon than any other Democratic leader. See the *New York Times*, June 27, 1972, 30.

gained ground and almost eked out a victory. This experience and the narrow loss to John Kennedy in 1960 led “Nixon and his aides...to do almost anything to crush the opposition in 1972.”²⁴⁹

The reality was that Muskie’s fall had signaled McGovern’s rise. And there was no doubt that Nixon’s team wanted to ensure that nothing would stop this. They wanted to control who was on the top of the Democratic ticket for the fall election. As a result, the edict from Nixon’s White House strategists was to stay out of McGovern’s way. “With the great success of McGovern and subsequent pullout of Muskie, the chances of a McGovern nomination are immensely improved,” Buchanan wrote in a memo to Haldeman and Mitchell. “Thus, we must do as little as possible, at this time, to impede McGovern’s rise.” The word was that no matter how “irresponsibly” McGovern should act, he should be left alone for the moment, other than on Vietnam, as they wanted to run against the antiwar crowd and tie McGovern to it. “He can be hit hard on this subject—a point which not only elevates his candidacy but also gets the President’s position restated while reinforcing the strong anti-war sentiment behind McGovern.” To which Haldeman wrote with a flourish, “Right.” Buchanan cautioned, though, that the team had to remain strategic: “On the other hand, the ammunition which will be our stock in the campaign—the extremist, radical labels; the pro-amnesty and pro-abortion positions; the radical chic; the gut-the-military attitude; etc.—should be held in abeyance until we are reasonably sure McGovern has the nomination.” Haldeman penned “Right” again. “The temptations will be high in many quarters to go after McGovern,” but Buchanan warned that the “word ought to go out to lay off with but a few exceptions. We have plenty of time to attach labels later, and the same labels which will defeat McGovern for the Presidency are the same labels which could prevent him from getting the nomination. Let’s not do Hubert’s work for him.” Haldeman responded again, “Absolutely!” In what was no doubt a clear reminder to bring the president’s chief hatchet man into the loop on these points, Haldeman wrote in the top corner of the memo in large bold letters a single name: “COLSON.”²⁵⁰

McGovern was the dream candidate for Nixon and his men as they were well aware that he would be the least likely candidate to appeal to the supporters (and the potential supporters) of Alabama Governor George Wallace. Indeed, Wallace’s decision to run as a Democrat in January helped Nixon as it further split the Democrats and ensured that a repeat of 1968 would not take place. The team was confident that while Wallace would do well in the field with alienated voters he would not do well enough to hurt them as the southern governor would not be able to sustain a national campaign and thus would not remain on the ballot in 1972.²⁵¹

Wallace had naturally done extremely well not only in the South but had also captured dissatisfied northern voters. It was both of those constituencies that Nixon’s team strongly believed they could capture, especially with McGovern at the top of the ticket. Fate took Wallace out of the race sooner than even they could have predicted. On May 15, while on the campaign trail in Laurel, Maryland, the Alabama governor and Democratic candidate was shot four times by Arthur Bremer in a failed assassination attempt. It was not long until the president and

²⁴⁹ Please see Jaworski, *The Right and the Power*, 333, 336.

²⁵⁰ Memorandum from Pat Buchanan to H. R. Haldeman and John Mitchell, April 27, 1972, WHSF, Contested Files, Box 7, Nixon Library.

²⁵¹ Historian Rick Perlstein maintains that while Nixon wanted the presence of Wallace to help divide the Democrats in the primaries, he could not have predicted that he would help by deciding to run on the Democratic ticket. While hinting that there may have been a secret deal between the president and the former Alabama governor to run as a Democrat, he maintains that Nixon had hoped that “Wallace would screw the Democrats,” but he would not “be in the race long enough to screw him.” Please see Perlstein, *Nixonland*, 631-632.

Haldeman thought of the value their hatchet man Charles Colson would bring to this event. In fact, Nixon wanted Colson's operation to pin the attempt on their political opponents—namely George McGovern and Ted Kennedy. The president ordered Haldeman to have Colson get in on the action, by having Ken Clawson enlist friendly media assets. The goal was to make it appear that initial reports on the interrogation of accused assassin Arthur Bremer revealed a connection to “a McGovern/Kennedy person.” As Nixon hinted, “Know what I mean? Rumors are going to flow all over the place. Put it on the left right away.” The president thought the word to the press should be that Bremer “was a supporter of McGovern and Kennedy. Now just put that out. Just say you have it on ‘unmistakable evidence.’” Naturally, both Nixon and Colson knew that such a trick was right up the alley for the author of the Canuck letter. As Colson later told the president, “You don’t have to sell it to [Clawson].” The aide had told Colson with a wink, “of course, *of course* he’s a student radical, naturally.” Colson had replied in kind, suggesting that Bremer was from Wisconsin and had actually “worked in McGovern’s campaign” to hearty laughter in the president’s office in the Old Executive Office Building.²⁵²

Everyone in the Democratic Party leadership had a target pinned to their lapels. Aiding the Nixon team was a growing split within the Democratic Party, a division between those who supported McGovern heading into the convention and those who believed the senator represented a narrow far left edge of the party, one that was spilling over into the national news media. Even though Muskie had suspended his campaign, he refused to endorse McGovern. “Party unity is not achieved with the magic wand of a kingmaker. No man can hand George McGovern a united party,” Muskie said.²⁵³ Nixon and Haldeman loved Muskie’s refusal and the emerging party turmoil. In his diary that evening, Haldeman welcomed Colson’s report concerning the Muskie news conference, which was “good news for us.”²⁵⁴ But just a week later, there was to be some bad news, as five individuals connected to Nixon’s men in the White House were arrested in the early morning hours of June 17 as they tried to bug the offices of the Democratic National Committee at the Watergate. The consequences of those actions, however, would not be felt until after the November election had come and gone. The matters of concern for the coming weeks were ensuring a divided Democratic Party with a McGovern victory. Indeed the prospect of McGovern’s rise worried some Democrats in Middle America. Governor Warren Hearnes of Missouri said that he could not support a McGovern nomination, and former governor Sam Goddard of Arizona joined others who believed that the senator “would be absolutely murdered by Nixon.” As Goddard declared, “I’ll tell you flat out, McGovern would be a disaster for us here.”²⁵⁵ Even though the “stop McGovern” movement would ultimately fail, the fight between moderates and the party establishment on one side and the “McGovernites” on the other would help the man from Yorba Linda. It was a battle for which the president’s loyal team had hoped. Heading into the summer, Nixon’s men intended to paint McGovern into a radical corner from which there was no escape. He would be seen by all as an extremist politician and a man out of touch with those in the great American heartland.

²⁵² WHT, Conversation No. 339-4, May 15, 1972, NARA.

²⁵³ *The New York Times*, June 10, 1972, 1, 12.

²⁵⁴ Haldeman, *Haldeman Diaries*, 470.

²⁵⁵ *The New York Times*, June 19, 1972, 22.

CHAPTER 4

THE MAKING OF AN EXTREMIST

McGovern's victory is not a popular victory; it is more a coup d'état of the Democratic Party, where a youthful leftist and suburban leftist elite has deposed and ousted the traditional Catholic and Jewish leadership of the Democratic Party. The fellow is not the people's choice.²⁵⁶

For a solid week in early June, 1972, speechwriters Pat Buchanan and Ken Khachigian were squirreled away in the Old Executive Office Building, drinking coffee, eating sandwiches, and assembling the "assault book" on George McGovern. Haldeman had requested this dark, furtive file to be ready before he and President Nixon traveled to the Soviet Union. Buchanan created only two copies, one for Haldeman, which he delivered to Camp David and the other for John Mitchell. The assault strategy was to be kept on a need-to-know basis in order to have time to fact check, but more importantly, to prevent leaks to the media about the direction for the campaign.²⁵⁷ The opening passage of the assault book, however, left little doubt on the nature of the strategy. It stated boldly, "Within are enough McGovern statements, positions, votes, not only to defeat the South Dakota Radical—but to have him indicted by a Grand Jury." The team understood early that McGovern could be portrayed as being so outside the mainstream that "only with enormous effort could we boot this election away." In the document, the speechwriters focused not only on issues but also on the "perceptions" of McGovern by the electorate. The text shares earlier predictions that despite the preference for the South Dakota senator as the opponent in the fall, there was a real danger that this skilled campaigner might move to the center and eke out a victory. As it stood going in, according to Buchanan, McGovern "could conceivably beat us by four to six points, on the basis of his get-out-the-vote machinery." This effort would be driven by "tens of thousands of 'True Believers,' working night and day for him." While Buchanan felt that his quarry was on the far left side of the political spectrum, he worried that he might not choose to run that way. The speechwriter understood that "while McGovern's positions are wooly-headed, he is an ambitious and pragmatic politician—who will not hesitate to move crab-wise to the center to win the election." The job during the campaign, then, was to "nail" McGovern on the left side of the political road if he wanted to be there or not, and thereby portray him as a "pet radical of Eastern Liberalism, the darling of the *New York Times*, the hero of the Berkeley Hill Jet Set; Mr. Radical Chic."²⁵⁸

By putting McGovern in bed with the radical left, political strategists like Buchanan planned to separate him from the base of the Democratic Party, while allowing the president to

²⁵⁶ Memorandum from Pat Buchanan to H.R. Haldeman and Clark MacGregor, July 14, 1972, WHSF, Box 14, Nixon Library.

²⁵⁷ There were many times that chief domestic adviser John Ehrlichman was seemingly out of the loop either because of disinterest or by design. Seven weeks after its release, Buchanan sent out the "Assault Book" on McGovern to all the principals except Ehrlichman. When Ken Cole called Strachan to "urgently" request a copy, Buchanan said no, and asked Strachan to check with Haldeman. Haldeman agreed that Ehrlichman could have a copy. Clearly, Strachan was puzzled by the issue, as he wrote in the margin to Haldeman, "Does Buchanan object?" See memorandum from Gordon Strachan to H.R. Haldeman, July 25, 1972, WHSF, Contested, Box 34, Nixon Library.

²⁵⁸ See the Buchanan/Khachigian Assault Strategy and Assault Book, June 8, 1972, Buchanan Papers, Box 9, NARA.

claim its traditional territory. As Buchanan wrote, “The better we portray McGovern as an elitist radical, the smaller his political base. By November, he should be postured as the Establishment’s fair-haired boy, and RN postured as the Candidate of the Common Man, the working man.” The best way to make the “extremist” label stick would be to ensure that the public did not forget that McGovern was “part and parcel of the Democratic liberal establishment” dating back to the 1930s, which created big government programs that both “bankrupted the workingman” and taxed “to death the middle class.” Moreover, before the end of the summer, the campaign tactics were designed to reveal the senator as a close friend of “Harvard, elitist left-wing professors, snot-nosed demonstrators, black radicals, and the whole elitist gang.”²⁵⁹ The attack strategy on McGovern and the Democrats was both gleeful and vicious. Buchanan and the other speechwriters began to detail the method of assault that was to depict McGovern as a dangerous radical more in touch with the fringe of the anti-war movement than with “hard working regular Americans.” The team planned to “skewer McGovern on national television” over his temperamental connection with radicals, stressing the belief that “America is tired of rock throwing, rioting demonstrators who threaten the public safety and make rational discourse impossible.”²⁶⁰

Despite this “nut-cutter” language, Nixon’s men actually planned a much more nuanced and careful *delivery* of these messages throughout the summer and the fall. The method for getting the word out to the public was to employ a focused, local—almost diffuse—approach, targeting Middle American voters where they lived, including Catholics, the white “ethnic” vote, blue collar and working class “hardhats,” utilizing many voices and medias, and avoiding the “shotgun” approach. It was admittedly a delicate balancing act, employing a strategy of painting the Democratic challenger into a corner. However, with five months remaining before the election, not shooting off all their volleys on the Democrats too quickly became a priority. The plan for the attacks was to “hang these one at a time around McGovern for the rest of the year.” The cautionary note in the assault book was that they would have to guard against appearing “too harsh or strident” with their strikes. As they held that “the hostile out there...will pounce on the first allegation of ‘Tricky Dick,’ or ‘smear’ campaign,” the approach was to take the knees out of the McGovern campaign while avoiding the perception of the old fighting president.²⁶¹

The historiography on the Nixon presidency plays heavily on a combination of “dirty tricks” and McGovern blunders to explain the trajectory of the 1972 election, but the team’s efforts at sophisticated, nuanced, and highly effective political hardball as a specific strategy has received insufficient scholarly attention. This is largely true because discussions on the internal politics of the 1972 election outside the parameters of Watergate are minimal in Nixon research. Stanley Kutler, Stephen Ambrose, Herbert Parmet, Melvin Small, and Richard Reeves, for example, devote little space to the mechanics of electioneering, choosing to focus primarily on

²⁵⁹ See the Buchanan/Khachigian Assault Strategy and Assault Book, June 8, 1972, Buchanan Papers, Box 9, NARA.

²⁶⁰ Memorandum from Pat Buchanan to Bill Timmons, June 15, 1972, and Briefing Memo, September 26, 1972, Buchanan Papers, Box 8, NARA.

²⁶¹ Memorandum from Pat Buchanan to John Mitchell, June 8, 1972, Buchanan Papers, Box 5, NARA. In material cut from various newspapers, Buchanan underlined figures, which showed that among Democratic delegates to the convention, 39 percent held post-graduate degrees compared with 4 percent in the American population. The upshot was that it was going to be an “elitist” convention. Concerning McGovern’s move to the middle, Nicholas von Hoffman wrote in the July 14, 1972 edition of the *Washington Post* about seeing the arrival of pacifist David Dellinger, a leader of the anti-war movement. “McGovern would have never been nominated without the people Dellinger led on the streets, but he walks around here unrecognized.” See page B1.

CREEP and the operations at 1701 and the connections to the larger events surrounding the administration's abuse of power. Recent books on Nixon including Conrad Black's *The Invincible Quest*, Elizabeth Drew's *President Nixon*, and Robert Dallek's *Partners in Power*, devote little time to the internal political strategy to win in a landslide election and retake the White House. The limited exception is Rick Perlstein's *Nixonland*, which positions Nixon's landslide victory at the polls as the natural outcome of a decade of intense national turmoil and upheaval that the politician from California had capitalized upon in one form or another over his entire career. This chapter provides, however, a much more detailed investigation into the electoral strategy of election year. While larger historical trends certainly were at work, this section focuses on those who had their boots on the ground during that seminal year. By shedding light inside the political machine as it set out against McGovern, it unpacks the making of an extremist.²⁶²

In the months before the South Dakotan actually secured the top spot on the Democratic ticket, it was clear which candidate Nixon's men preferred to attack. Surveying the reelection terrain and the mood of the country, men like Haldeman knew how easy it would be to sink their knives into political prey like George McGovern. The senator's candidacy presented an excellent opportunity to expose the clear distinctions between the Nixon brand and the self-styled "Prairie Populist." Indeed, long before McGovern bested his inner-party rivals, Richard Nixon's loyal staffers already had a huge attack file on McGovern, including his stance on abortion, women's rights, drugs, amnesty for draft resisters, and of course, his anti-war stance concerning Vietnam. As Khachigian suggested to Buchanan, "McGovern knows damn good and well that we have enough material on him to sink a battleship. He knows that we won't be afraid to use this information."²⁶³ But Chief of Staff H.R. Haldeman wanted more than just to attack in reaction to the issues McGovern raised. After reading many of Buchanan's memos, he wanted the president's strong points featured as much as the attacks on McGovern's weaknesses. He too feared the old "tricky Dickey" charges. "The Buchanan memorandum fails to recognize the necessity to keep our strength up front and center," Haldeman wrote. "In other words, all of our attack lines on the opposition should end up emphasizing our strengths. We must not get trapped into McGovern's bog of peddling himself a new face. If people want new ideas, this Administration has the boldest initiatives in history."²⁶⁴

The chief of staff's pressure on Buchanan stemmed from a meeting he had with the president one day after the release of the assault book, and Nixon was growing anxious over the details of the attack on McGovern. Following his meeting with the president, Haldeman documented in his diary what he was going to kick down the food chain for the political strategists was that the contrast between the two men was paramount. "We need savage attack lines against the McGovern positions. Get McGovern tied as an extremist. Don't give any ground regarding the fact that he's changed his position." McGovern, Nixon believed, was "guilty by association" with radicals including Abbie Hoffman, Jerry Rubin, and Angela Davis. "We should

²⁶² Even Nixon's Presidential Library currently devotes the smallest portion of its exhibit to the 1972 election. While Theodore H. White deals with the election (also via largely the crimes of Watergate,) his work was published more than thirty years ago before the archives opened on the Nixon presidency.

²⁶³ Memorandum from Ken Khachigian to Pat Buchanan, June 19, 1972, Khachigian Papers, Box 8, NARA.

²⁶⁴ Memorandum from H.R. Haldeman to Pat Buchanan, June 12, 1972, Khachigian Papers, Box 8, NARA.

get a maximum number of pictures of rowdy people around McGovern, while we go for the all-out-square America.”²⁶⁵

However, while Haldeman expected his staff to speak about the president’s achievements in foreign policy and the dangers of a McGovern presidency, he could not help seeing the president’s accomplishments in contrast to his opponent’s obvious deficiencies. And while Haldeman wanted the messages tightly controlled, his memorandums could not hide his obvious relish for the rough stuff against his opponents. So while the president’s chief of staff reminded staffers that “President Nixon has launched some very major, far-reaching, foreign policy initiatives,” he made it clear that the nation “can’t afford to let an inexperienced novice come in and pick up the reins at this point. We cannot afford to have McGovern in the White House in terms of foreign policy. His inexperience and naivety in the foreign policy field would be disastrous. Do we really want ‘White Flag McGovern’ in the White House?”²⁶⁶ Haldeman’s words are a perfect example of how members of the inner circle fueled each other’s fire and pushed the intricate election machine forward. Two days later, in reaction to the Haldeman request, Khachigian fired off a memo to Buchanan indicating the strong public support for the president’s handling of Vietnam. Helping matters was the latest Harris Poll showing that 75 percent of Americans believed that a quick pullout of Vietnam would not be appropriate without an agreement over POWs. According to Khachigian, the one issue that was “never too early to start on McGovern is Vietnam, and we should be discrediting him night and day.” While venerating the president’s policies, the attack strategy was to refer to McGovern as “Hanoi George,” a candidate that is “quite popular with the politburo.” As Khachigian suggested to Buchanan, “Umbrella sales ought to perk up when he gets the nomination.”²⁶⁷

The Republican attack team had been all over the Democratic candidate for his comments over the progress of the peace negotiations with Hanoi, trying to paint McGovern as not only naive and weak but unpatriotic. The candidate’s comment in the *Washington Post* that, “Begging is better than bombing,” was jumped upon by Buchanan’s staff before the paper hit the street. “I would go to Hanoi and beg if I thought it would release the boys one day earlier,” McGovern said in reference to the North Vietnam peace proposal: “If I was President, I would grab that offer with both hands.”²⁶⁸

On the same day that Buchanan issued the assault book to Haldeman, aide Ken Rietz laid out the issues with McGovern as the presumed candidate, and reiterated the dangers of attacking their potential opponent too hard too soon. “McGovern should be an easier candidate to run against than [Hubert] Humphrey...; there is a danger in the McGovern candidacy, however, that may not be immediately apparent. That danger lies in the immediate temptation to go for the jugular. In my opinion, this would be a real danger.” Since McGovern does not “appear to be an evil man,” he falls into the unfortunate category, at least for the attack team, of looking like the

²⁶⁵ Haldeman, *Haldeman Diaries*, 470.

²⁶⁶ Memorandum from H.R. Haldeman to Pat Buchanan, June 12, 1972, Khachigian Papers, Box 8, NARA. Of course, Haldeman is referring to numerous controversial statements by McGovern on the Vietnam War and negotiations with Hanoi, such as, “begging is better than bombing.”

²⁶⁷ Memorandum from Ken Khachigian to Pat Buchanan, June 13 and 14, 1972, Khachigian Papers, Box 8, NARA. The story that got a great deal of interest in the basement offices of the White House and in the EOB appeared in the *Washington Post* on June 13, 1972, which reprinted praises of George McGovern on Hanoi Radio by the North Vietnamese. See also the *Washington Post* article on how Hanoi was said to prefer McGovern over other candidates, which ran July 22, 1972, D15.

²⁶⁸ Remarks during a meeting with the South Carolina delegation reported in the *Washington Post*, June 30, 1972, A4.

“man next door.” According to Rietz, the candidate “appears to be straightforward, honest, and *sincere*.” Given McGovern’s sudden rise in popularity, the staffer was worried that a “broadside” attack would look like a “cheap Republican trick,” causing the Democrats to rally behind McGovern. As Rietz wrote, “We cannot make a martyr out of McGovern or we will have real problems.” Rather, the word was to let his sudden rise in popularity run its course, and not exhaust all of their “material” too soon. For the final six weeks of the campaign, the idea was to keep McGovern on the defensive with a new plan of attack on the issue each week, from busing to abortion to prayer in schools. As the memorandum made clear, “The key is not to destroy him but to keep him always on the defensive, explaining his position.” Nixon’s aide mused about the difficulty of holding back, as they felt that not dropping the bricks on McGovern early “will be a very difficult thing to accomplish because the natural tendency is to hit him now and hit him often.” The internal memorandum, however, enunciated exactly the type of strategy that eventually won the day, and that, as Rietz suggested, was to paint ‘McGovern as someone out of touch with reality and the American people, insincere, and a politician of the first order.’”²⁶⁹

Based upon a presidential memorandum of June 10, Charles Colson was planning to set up McGovern for attack by also connecting him in the public’s mind with the establishment, “liberal” media. Journalists, Colson, believed, were temperamentally predisposed to the Democrats and the senator’s left wing policies, which he labeled “the McGovern Protective Society.” The special counsel maintained that “what we have here is a situation where the working press, because they really believe in their hearts exactly what McGovern believes in, are frantically doing everything they can to clean him up and make him a respectable candidate for the nomination.” Colson wanted his aide Doug Hallett to draft columns that would deal with his belief that 90 percent of the working press agreed with McGovern’s “stand on amnesty, abortion, pot, surrender in Vietnam, confiscation of wealth, [and] the \$1,000 baby bonus for welfare recipients.” The political strategist stressed that since the “realists” in the media knew that these positions would “sink” McGovern in the election it was their aim to conceal his “real views during the period of the campaign so that he can win the election” before revealing its true nature. Colson’s line was that the left wing were “willing to use any means whatever to get their man nominated, even if it means covering up [McGovern’s] real views during the period of the campaign.”²⁷⁰

The guts of Colson’s memo came right from the heart of Richard Nixon. The word was that the difference between left wing and right wing extremists is that those on the right would not forfeit their principles to get elected while the left would do anything to “get power.” These ‘power hungry leftists’ were part of the same ‘evil’ Eastern Establishment, one that Nixon went on numerous rants about on the White House tapes. Colson’s agreement and animation on these subjects colored the way the Nixon administration communicated through its writers and helped shape the nature and tenor of the campaign. His views almost mirrored that of the president.

²⁶⁹ See memorandum from Jeb Magruder to Charles Colson, June 13, 1972, a forward of a memorandum from Ken Rietz to Magruder of June 8, 1972. Both are found in Colson Papers, Box 79, NARA.

²⁷⁰ Memorandum from Charles Colson to Doug Hallett, June 13, 1972, Colson Papers, Box 132, NARA. Hallett had required little coaxing or coaching on this point, because as far back as April, the staffer was firing off attack memos to Colson concerning McGovern’s “trips to the Virgin Islands and Galbraith’s Vermont farm, his mod clothing, and, most particularly, his \$110,000 Japanese-style home complete with appropriate furnishings.” The plan was that if McGovern continued to do well in the primaries, they would “use this kind of material to blast away at his Populist image.” Colson’s handwritten response back to Hallett on this point was, “Doug—excellent point” while scrawling in the top corner that he should be sure and cc the text to Buchanan, Clawson, and Dean. See memorandum from Doug Hallett to Charles Colson, April 12, 1972, WHSF, Contested Files, Box 3, Nixon Library.

Nixon believed that the press was ideologically pitted against him, and shared the values of McGovern completely. “If you consider the real ideological bent of the *New York Times*, The *Washington Post*, *Time*, *Newsweek*, and the three television networks, you will find overwhelmingly that their editorial bias comes down to the side of amnesty, pot, abortion, confiscation of wealth (unless it is theirs), massive increases in welfare, unilateral disarmament, reduction of their defenses, and surrender in Vietnam. Now they have a candidate within sight of the nomination who shares all these views.” But more than that, “they [the media] will clean up their candidate, they will lie, distort and do anything that is necessary to get into power. They never allow their piously held principles to get in the way of their overriding drive to gain and wield power.” The president naturally had wanted Buchanan and Colson on it right away.²⁷¹

But the campaign mostly cherry picked articles to prove the veracity of their views on the media. They were even upset with the more conservative *Washington Evening Star*, which pointed out that McGovern’s “radical” positions on a number of issues were not actually radical at all but in fact were in the best traditions of American history. Buchanan wrote to Strachan in frustration, decrying what he saw as effective counterweights to their attack posture. “This tactic to portray McGovern as remarkably reasonable because of his ‘association’ with other great leaders of the country strikes me as remarkably effective for McGovern to use throughout the campaign.”²⁷² Fearing that the media would try to clean up McGovern’s image to win the election, Nixon himself instructed Mitchell to “get Democrats and Independents, not Republicans, to nail McGovern on the left side of the road which his record so clearly identifies him with.” The president, Colson, and Buchanan understood that dividing McGovern from his own party would have real benefits.²⁷³ However, the idea that the media was predisposed to attacking Nixon and acting “soft” on McGovern in reality was pure fiction.

Though Nixon’s inner circle appeared to loathe the media, they were not above using it at every opportunity, especially when journalists were pointing out with greater frequency how McGovern appeared to be increasingly out of step with the core of his party or unable to bring its factions together for a common cause. In fact, the Nixon team used media outlets as a matter of routine, sending information to friendly columnists with pet campaign themes whenever possible, turning any utterance in their favor against McGovern from the media to their advantage.²⁷⁴ Buchanan, for example, seized upon Walter Cronkite’s suggestion in a commentary on the CBS Evening News that there was a growing rift between centrists and the left wing of the party, and it was one among many that they wished to use for political spin for the party conventions. As Buchanan stressed in a memorandum to the president, “Cronkite is right. The McGovern camp is divided between True Believers and Pragmatists.” Fired up by the press reports, Buchanan set out to attack the McGovern camp and his brand of “undiluted Prairie Populism” through the media. Indeed, the growing perception in the press was that McGovern

²⁷¹ Memorandum from the President to Pat Buchanan, ccd through Charles Colson, June 10, 1972, WHSF, Box 48, Nixon Library. See also Memorandum from Charles Colson to Doug Hallett, June 13, 1972, Colson Papers, Box 132, NARA.

²⁷² Memorandum from Pat Buchanan to Gordon Strachan, July 1, 1972, Buchanan Papers, Box 6, NARA. See also Clayton Fritchey’s article in *The Washington Post*, July 1, 1972, A19. The article was clipped and is found in Buchanan Papers, Box 8, NARA.

²⁷³ “Eyes Only” Memorandum from the President to John Mitchell, June 6, 1972, WHSF, Contested Files, Box 50, Nixon Library. See also the discussion on the strategy to divide the Democrats and take an end-run on the old Democratic coalition in Chapter 1.

²⁷⁴ Memorandum from Charles Colson to Doug Hallett, June 13, 1972, Colson Papers, Box 132, NARA.

did not have control of his delegates, was in bed with the far left over abortion and drugs, and was at odds with the Democrat-controlled House over the president's Vietnam policy concerning Vietnamization and a negotiated settlement. Nixon's attack team exploited every opportunity.²⁷⁵

The Nixon administration's reelection campaign found a valuable resource in the national media, an institution that largely matched Republican pronouncements of doom and gloom regarding the Democrats' chances as they headed into their convention. Columnists such as Stewart Alsop believed the Democrats had neither the unity nor the ideas to beat Nixon in the fall. "The Democratic Party, in short, has never in its turbulent history been more rancid with small dislikes and big hatreds. . . In this situation, who could conceivably defeat Richard Nixon in November? The answer seems obvious: only Richard Nixon." Alsop described Nixon's first term in office as a "shrewdly orchestrated setup for the election and the second term in office," when the changes would really come about. Even Vietnam, seemingly the biggest foreign policy conundrum of the day, was not a winner for McGovern. As Alsop pointed out to his millions of readers across the nation, "Hanoi, of course, would very much like to see George McGovern President—the official paper has said as much."²⁷⁶

As far back as May, columnist Crosby S. Noyes warned of McGovern's extreme positions. "What we are talking about essentially is McGovern's concept of what this nation is, where it stands and what it is prepared to do in a world which is not yet governed by the laws of the International Boy Scout Association."²⁷⁷ A survey done by the *New York Times* in early June suggested massive defections from party ranks should McGovern get the nod. Forty percent of Humphrey supporters said that they would defect to the Republicans in a Nixon-McGovern showdown.²⁷⁸ *Newsweek* was no different. As the magazine dryly observed, "Many [party] regulars look forward to a Democratic convention dominated by McGovern delegates chosen under McGovern reform rules with all the enthusiasm Rome felt for the onslaught of the barbarian hordes." The terms "radical" and "extremist" also became common in press accounts concerning McGovern, much like the labels pinned to Republican Barry Goldwater during the 1964 presidential election. *Newsweek* told its readers, "Most critical of all, [some in the Democratic Party] consider McGovern a loser on the grand, Goldwater scale—the kind who will not only concede to the opposition in the White House but will doom whole tickets to defeat. Down to the state legislative levels." Naturally, Republican leaders smelled Democrat blood. "If McGovern gets the nomination," Minority Leader Gerald Ford said, "we're going to carry the House." McGovern's candidacy was also engendering little confidence in the South. According to some political observers in Dixie, "McGovern couldn't win the South if he had Robert E. Lee on his ticket."²⁷⁹

Senator and Nixon loyalist, Bob Dole, however, was wary of a backlash from the attacks,

²⁷⁵ Memorandum from Pat Buchanan to the President, forwarded to Chuck Colson from Bruce Kehrli, June 29, 1972, Colson Papers, Box 79, NARA. See also the *Washington Evening Star*, June 30, 1972. The article was clipped and is found in Buchanan Papers, Box 8, NARA. When Nixon asked to have one of his writing team respond in the media answering McGovern's critique of his foreign policy, he wanted to be sure that the text was written by one of the "hard-liners like Buchanan and not by the soft-liners." Nixon instructed that some of these stories be vetted by Kissinger, but "only for substance, not for style." See the memorandum from the President to Charles Colson, June 28, 1972, Colson Papers, Box 79, NARA.

²⁷⁶ See Stewart Alsop's column in *Newsweek*, July 17, 1972, 84.

²⁷⁷ See Crosby S. Noyes' Column in the *Washington Evening Star*, May 11, 1972. The article was clipped and is found in Buchanan Papers, Box 8, NARA.

²⁷⁸ Please see the *New York Times*, June 9, 1972, 1, 18.

²⁷⁹ See *Newsweek*, June 19, 1972, 24, 26.

and warned of “overkill” on the McGovern assaults. The fear was that since they were enjoying the good fortune of facing the weakest Democratic candidate possible in McGovern, they did not want to knock him out of the race. “We don’t want that. We don’t want to lose him,” Dole said, who thought little about McGovern’s chances of winning any states in November. Dole remarked dryly that McGovern would carry “South Dakota, maybe.” Veteran politicians like Dole understood that party unity was in a fragile state and not all in the Democratic Party appreciated the dimensions of the McGovern candidacy. “It’s too late for the Democrats to call off their convention,” Dole told reporters mockingly. “The programs have already been printed. They have to go through with it.”²⁸⁰ Buchanan too warned once again of going too far or being clumsy in the delivery of the attacks, especially as it would likely bring a counterattack in the press of “smear tactics” from “Tricky Dick.” As Buchanan outlined, it’s “the old ‘Low Road’ so familiar to Nixon and his hatchet men. This is, it appears, the McGovern strategy for answering all of the material we have piled up on Georgie; and it is a strategy which McGovern will be counting upon the press to assist in its implementation.” Never truly believing that the press would keep up the pressure on the senator, Buchanan cautioned that his team must “be scrupulously accurate” in its attacks, while forcing McGovern to stay on the defensive, including seeking an apology over his comparison of Nixon to Adolph Hitler. Although Buchanan wanted to keep the image of the campaign “out of the smear stage” from the start, it did not mean that they were not going fight back. “Each time McGovern raises this charge of ‘smear,’” Buchanan wrote, “we ought to have those quotes to stuff right down his throat.”²⁸¹

Overconfidence, though, was not the forte of Nixon loyalists during the 1972 reelection campaign. Plagued by fears and insecurities following three years in uneasy power in the White House, there was constant concern that the reelection team would be felled by the growing predictions of an easy victory against the McGovern-led Democrats in the fall. So much so that when Clark MacGregor replaced John Mitchell as Nixon’s campaign manager, he immediately warned against impudence. “There is a feeling that the President is a shoo-in for reelection,” MacGregor said during his first press conference in his new post in early July. “It is a very dangerous feeling to have.” Harkening back to Nixon’s drop in the polls in the last weeks of the 1968 federal election, the new campaign manager warned the same thing might occur once again in November. MacGregor wanted a sense of “urgency” to rule the grassroots drive for Nixon.²⁸² Believing that this effort would be motivated by the prospect of a radical in the White House, the campaign zeroed in on McGovern even before it was clear the senator *was* the candidate. By the time McGovern had finally placed a stranglehold on the nomination, the team was in full attack mode to place the South Dakotan on the outside of his own party. Charles Colson, following Nixon’s lead, instructed MacGregor “to get the point out that we have heard from thousands of Democrats across the country and that this will not be a Republican vs. Democrat campaign this

²⁸⁰ The *Washington Evening Star*, June 16, 1972, A-6. The next day five men were apprehended burglarizing the Democratic National Committee’s headquarters in the Watergate.

²⁸¹ Memorandum from Pat Buchanan to John Mitchell and H.R. Haldeman, June 25, 1972, Buchanan Papers, Box 2, NARA. McGovern on more than one occasion compared the administration’s bombing of North Vietnam to Hitler’s killing of the Jews. On March 1, 1972, McGovern suggested that the Vietnam bombing was “the most barbaric act ... committed by any modern power since the death of Adolph Hitler.” See RNC Research Division October 6, 1972, Buchanan Papers, Box 8, NARA. In an interview with Gregg Herrington from the *Associated Press* on June 29, 1972, McGovern repeated the Hitler comparison.

²⁸² MacGregor is quoted in the *Washington Post*, July 6, 1972, A11. The article as well as polling data from the 1968 campaign was clipped and is found in Buchanan Papers, Box 8, NARA.

year but rather a campaign of Republicans, Democrats and Independents behind the President against the McGovern elite that has taken over the Democratic Party machinery.”²⁸³

The team pushed out the message to the hard hats in the heartland, putting out numerous stories about McGovern’s “elitism.” These included the story concerning the Democratic nominee’s move from Maryland to the District of Columbia and his refusal to enroll his daughter in a public school. McGovern’s decision to send her to a largely white school in exclusive Bethesda, Maryland, was seized upon as a move by someone who was out of touch with the challenges faced by ordinary American families. As Khachigian pointed out to Southerners and others worrying about the controversial issue of inner city schools and busing, “McGovern can afford to avoid poor schools, can the average working man?” The emerging issue in the strategy session among speechwriters and strategists like Buchanan and Khachigian was the need to stress to working class voters that they needed to fear not just the man but the extreme nature of his ideas. The label with the most mileage to tag the presumptive candidate with was McGovern the “extremist.” This, they believed, would be a sure winner for Nixon in the fall. Khachigian felt, though, that the word was not getting out and that he needed to hammer the point home again and again: “At the risk of being repetitive, let me be a bit more explicit concerning my thinking that the word to tar McGovern with is ‘extremist’ and not *radical*.” Since Khachigian thought it had become somewhat “fashionable” to be a radical, the term was losing its effect. Additionally, the senator from South Dakota did not appear to match the label. “McGovern doesn’t look like a radical—with his \$200 suits, his modish styling, his Gucci ties, sideburns no longer than most, relatively short hair.” Khachigian stressed “extremist” takes the appearance problem away as “...one doesn’t have to look like an extremist to be one. [Barry] Goldwater was the most solid-looking guy you could think of—a square-jawed all-American—yet it stuck with him; the same for George.” In a memo to Buchanan he suggested the need for surrogates on the trail in the summer and autumn to understand that “‘radical is thru in ’72.’”²⁸⁴

McGovern the elitist with extreme ideas actually proved to be smack in the middle of Pat Buchanan’s wheelhouse. The former newspaperman and fierce Nixon loyalist wholeheartedly agreed with the characterization not only politically but personally. He contended that those who were rallying to support McGovern were just the sort of people who would hurt the candidate the most in Middle America because the senator was on the wrong side of history.

We should be certain that when the voters enter the booth, they know who represents the common man and who the elite, who speaks for American strength and for national weakness, who would be permissive on social issues and who would be tough, who is interested in more government “programs” and who wants tax cuts, who is the darling of the purple sunglasses set, and who represents middle America, who is a moderate centrist and who is an exotic extremist, who is a man of the middle and who is a man of the far left, who would disgrace us in Vietnam and who would bring the prisoners home in honor...²⁸⁵

Painting McGovern as an extremist was even more mandatory when McGovern stopped acting like one. Buchanan’s memo to the president through Haldeman on July 12 pointed out the unpleasant facts. “Despite the ideological liberalism of Mr. McGovern, there is a clear conservative thrust to many of his issues ads.” Buchanan was not pleased with the Democratic

²⁸³ Memorandum from Charles Colson to Clark MacGregor, July 13, 1972, Colson Papers, Box 132, NARA.

²⁸⁴ Memorandum from Ken Khachigian to Pat Buchanan, June 9, 1982, Khachigian Papers, Box 14, NARA.

²⁸⁵ Memorandum from Pat Buchanan to H.R. Haldeman (as requested), August 7, 1972, Buchanan Papers, Box 5, NARA. On June 28, Nixon announced that no new draftees would be sent to Vietnam.

nominee talking about “cleaning up the welfare mess,” and that he “could find nothing in the way of elitist, new left themes” in his primary campaigns. There were no “Amnesty, abortion, pot, soak-the-rich, slash defense” issues. Instead, there was an alliance on older liberal approaches that the administration feared including lowering the age of social security and universal medical coverage to appeal to older voters. That McGovern was moving away from social liberalism and towards economic liberalism, which political analysts Scammon and Wattenburg had warned about, created a sense of foreboding in the attack team. “There’s hardly a trace of what one might call social liberalism, or ‘radical chic’ politics in the McGovern advertising campaign.” The best approach Buchanan advised was to drive home that he is an “extremist,” in his policies and positions, without “raging.” The idea was that instead of using the “meat ax” the “scalpel is preferred.”²⁸⁶

Dozens of internal memorandums make it clear that the language the team wanted to use out on the campaign trail was not merely created for surrogates to fire up the base on the stump, but reflected the members’ own prejudices and personal politics. White House memos are rife with comments referring to those in the McGovern camp as “egg-heads” “eastern elites,” and McGovern as the “so-called populist” who has “surrounded himself with a bunch of white-collar intellectuals who don’t know anything about the working man.”²⁸⁷ McGovern is continuously portrayed as the kind of man who instead provides tax breaks for artists and his “radical chic friends at the expense of the American taxpayer.”²⁸⁸ It was clear, however, that the members of the team knew their attitudes, if properly packaged and presented, would certainly resonate in the heartland, and therefore represented a winning strategy.

Buchanan and the other writers and political strategists pushed as much about McGovern as a big government elitist as they could into every media orifice, underscoring all of the resentment they could muster from blue collar voters over policies they believed would increase the tax burden on working Americans. As Buchanan told the *Washington Evening Star*, “Everybody is fed up with giving their money to other people.” He understood that they could turn worker frustration and anger “into votes for Richard Nixon.”²⁸⁹ Buchanan, a former newspaperman himself, scoured media sources for ammunition for proof of McGovern’s elitism to provide to the surrogates. What Buchanan often found was journalists who shared his team’s specific views on McGovern, and he found them in increasing numbers. As Robin Wright noted in the *Christian Science Monitor*, “The programs Sen. George S. McGovern will be enunciating in his flat Midwestern accent for the next two months bear a strong New England imprint.” To his great delight, Buchanan underlined the article’s contention that McGovern’s brain trust came from the familiar “elite, Eastern intellectual establishment” of Harvard, MIT, and Tufts University.²⁹⁰

One topic that was not a winner for November was the economy. While the Nixon administration was certainly concerned over what McGovern would do with the economy, as Buchanan pointed out to the president, after a request by Haldeman, “By most everyone’s

²⁸⁶ Memorandum from Pat Buchanan to the President, through Haldeman, July 12, 1972, WHSF, Contested Files, Box 1, Nixon Library.

²⁸⁷ Memorandum from Ken Khachigian to Charles Colson, September 15, 1972, Khachigian Papers, Box 9, NARA.

²⁸⁸ In reference to McGovern’s supposed constituents in Greenwich Village, see Buchanan’s August 31, 1972 briefing note in Buchanan Papers, Box 9, NARA.

²⁸⁹ See Buchanan’s numerous underlined press clippings, including the article in the *Washington Evening Star*, September 14, 1972, in Buchanan Papers, Box 8, NARA.

²⁹⁰ The September 13, 1972 article in the *Christian Science Monitor*, was copied by Buchanan and is found in Buchanan Papers, Box 8, NARA.

judgment, our record is not considered as that good; this is our ‘weakest’ point—and a national debate over whether we managed the economy well is perhaps the one debate with McGovern we can lose.” Therefore, Buchanan’s recommendation to the president was not to defend their record on the economy, but to focus on McGovern’s “disastrous” policies. “In short, let’s not so much defend our record, which *is* subject to criticism, as to attack McGovern with being a clear and present danger to the prosperity we now have.” The speechwriter laid out the position for sidestepping the economy. Buchanan maintained that the voters’ decision in the fall must not rest on the Democrats’ “rhetoric,” or any of their “issues—i.e., ‘unemployment’ and the unequal economic record of the last four years—it must focus upon our issues—i.e., the extremism, elitism, radicalism, kookism, of McGovern’s person, campaign, and programs, against the solid, strong, effective leadership of the President.” But much of this was completely disingenuous. Buchanan harkened back to how John Kennedy’s use of the mythical “missile gap” in 1960 and charges of “extremism” with Barry Goldwater in 1964 helped to create issues “on which elections turn, sometimes legitimate issues, sometimes illegitimate.” As the speechwriter put it, “When we portray McGovern’s ideas as preposterous, foolish, and even dangerous to U.S. security and the nation’s economy, we are right now pushing against an open door—with the media at large, as well as the country.” Nixon’s strategist knew that the campaign needed to be waged on the “manifest unqualification” of McGovern’s “character and his ilk to even be in the Presidential contest,” rather than a “damn referendum” over the administration’s “spotty economic performance.”²⁹¹ Of course, George McGovern was about to offer a gift that made Americans forget all about that “spotty” economic record, and he did it before a national television audience.

The team of Nixon loyalists looked forward to the Democratic National Convention in Miami Beach in July like wolves at the bottom of a buffalo jump. They knew that the event would provide a treasure trove of material to seize upon for the fall campaign, but even they could not have imagined how rich that treasure would be. While the internal communiqués reveal strong confidence that what Americans saw on their television screens would frighten them enough that they would vote for Richard Nixon, they intended to maximize the damage throughout the fall. It is clear that while Nixon’s men planned to cut no corners in their march to victory, they never had much respect for their opponent from South Dakota or what would come out of the impending DNC in Miami. When an enterprising White House staffer brought something called the “McGovern Eclipse,” to the attention of speechwriter Ray Price, he could not wait to fire it off in a memo to the president. “On the day the Democratic convention opens in Miami, July 10, there will be a total eclipse of the sun. The eclipse will be full in Alaska and Northern Canada and partial in the rest of North America and Western Europe. At 4:42 p.m. EDT, the sun will be 80 percent covered in New York City.” Predicting the gloom and the dissention to come at the DNC, Price wrote with some glee, “They even made the sun not to shine . . . !”²⁹²

Wearied delegates assembled in the Convention Center in Miami Beach, Florida, on July 10, 1972 to decide upon the candidate to face Richard Nixon in the fall. The president’s team watched the events with some disgust, noting that when it was their turn later, they would make a

²⁹¹ Memorandum from Pat Buchanan to the President, as per Haldeman’s request, August 6, 1972, WHSF, Contested Files, Box 1, Nixon Library.

²⁹² Memorandum from Ray Price to the President, June 14, 1972, President Office Files (POF), Box 17, NARA.

point of doing almost everything differently, especially in displaying party unity.²⁹³ From the beginning, the convention was a floor fight for the heart and soul of the Democratic Party. Radicals, political activists, conservative Democrats, labor, and remnants of the Old Left struggled in the humid convention center in sessions that lasted well into the night when much of the prime-time television audience had retired for the evening. As the Nixon team watched with more than a little pleasure, McGovern chaired a new rules committee that mandated that a percentage of party delegates come from minority groups, including women. That party's lively debate over contentious issues, such as rights for gay Americans, and abortion rights, was welcomed by the Nixon political strategists who used this later as ammunition to portray McGovern as outside the mainstream of American voters and the core of his own party. Challenges to the new rules, disputes over credentials, and fencing over the choosing and seating of delegates created a tense atmosphere. That McGovern himself championed the new groups and delegates angered traditional labor leadership and the big city political operations like Mayor Richard Daley's Chicago machine. The McGovern-led grassroots insurgency, that appeared as a threat to the more conservative wing of the Democratic Party, fueled by an anti-war platform, quickly captured delegates. A "Stop McGovern" effort tried unsuccessfully to change the rules after the game was over, pressing for a state-by-state proportional distribution of delegates to derail the South Dakotan senator. In the end, McGovern captured the day, winning on a platform of diversity with minorities and women, despite a battle with the credentials committee to toss the entire elected delegation.²⁹⁴

McGovern appeared unfazed by the controversy, believing his inclusive coalition would outshine anything that the Republicans could muster. "Well, I frankly welcome the contrast with the smug, dull and empty event which will take place here in Miami next month," McGovern said in his acceptance speech, in a direct swipe at the upcoming Republican convention.²⁹⁵ The senator made it clear that he intended to be a political reformer "We choose this struggle," McGovern told his party delegates. "We reformed our party and let the people in."²⁹⁶ The South Dakotan believed that the nation was ready for drastic change, or as Democratic pollster Pat Caddell put it, a "political revolution," one that would throw over the old guard and party chieftains. McGovern's staff also promised that it would embark on a post-convention sweep to the conservative south and capitalize on its discontent with Washington and appeal to the Wallace voters who were restless and eager for change.²⁹⁷

However, the perception of the candidate as someone "soft on abortion and indifferent to the American prisoners of war," especially in the South with the precarious state of race relations, meant dangers to local Democrats. Some local party members were worried about what McGovern meant to them. David Herring, chair of the Jefferson County Democratic Committee, began to inform all of his candidates running for local office to stay away from McGovern and the national party in order to survive. "Maybe people here understand if McGovern were just a 'nigger-lover' for political reasons—using the blacks and making it known that he needed their votes. But he comes across as a man who really likes blacks—a 'nigger-liker'—you know."²⁹⁸

²⁹³ Please see Chapter 5 for a discussion concerning the preparation for the RNC, and the comparisons with the Democratic event.

²⁹⁴ See Perlstein, *Nixonland*, 686-698, and White, *The Making of the President, 1972*, 162-166, 170-175.

²⁹⁵ Please see the *New York Times*, July 14, 1972, 11.

²⁹⁶ See the *Wall Street Journal*, July 13, 1972, 1.

²⁹⁷ Caddell's comments are found in the *Wall Street Journal*, July 12, 1972, 1.

²⁹⁸ Herring is quoted in the *New York Times*, July 24, 1972, 14.

Many Democrats feared emerging from Miami Beach the divided party they were coming out of Chicago in 1968, a convention that contributed to their loss in the November election. As New Jersey Democratic Party boss Richard Leone said, “We don’t have the luxury this year of playing those kinds of games anymore. There’s too much at stake.” However, many believed that the strongest issue was the divisive incumbent president. As Leone suggested, “Nobody is going to unite Democrats like Richard Nixon.” McGovern’s campaign manager Frank Mankiewicz agreed, adding that the party would unite despite the division at the convention as “there is still the great unifier—Richard Nixon.”²⁹⁹ McGovern himself told his convention that Nixon was their “unwitting unifier.” However, confidence that Nixon would throw red meat as he had in the midterm elections did not mask the reality that no one divided Democrats like an insurgent McGovern candidacy, or his “new constituency for change.” While the nominee and the party believed they could emerge from the convention and create an amalgamation of blue-collar, black, and suburbanites voters, the American Federation of Labor and other traditional Democratic backers were wary at best and openly hostile at worst about McGovern and his supporters. While the South Dakotan senator hoped to bring together a coalition of the disconnected, Richard Nixon’s men were planning to build their own coalition, one that would venture into traditional Democratic territory, no matter who the DNC nominee was. But McGovern had made this strategy all the more realistic.³⁰⁰

The idea had gained traction since 1970, as political analyst Richard Scammon had then articulated, “It’s very true that malaise and discontent exist” among Catholic voters concerning busing and crime, but the assumption that “it has to go to the left [is] not necessarily true.” As Scammon found, Nixon was “much closer to this voter’s type of dissent.”³⁰¹ While dividing the Democrats and pursuing the old Democratic coalition was the plan for any eventual nominee, the choice of McGovern made it that much easier for Nixon’s men to exploit. McGovern’s base had been tested by the primaries and was bruised by a divisive and less than satisfying convention. As George McGovern accepted his party’s nomination, he paid tribute to all of his vanquished opponents, including George Wallace and some of the AFL-CIO bosses who had run the failed stop-McGovern movement. But the damage had been done, and little he did in the months ahead appeared to slow his decline. McGovern came out of the blocks in slow motion as his address to accept his party’s nomination was carried to a drastically reduced audience, as the nominee finally delivered his speech in the middle of the night.³⁰² President Nixon apparently thought little of McGovern’s acceptance speech or the time of its delivery at the Democratic National Convention. As Nixon recalled in his memoirs concerning the early morning address, it was, “2:48 A.M. in Miami—prime time on Guam.”³⁰³

Later that morning in the White House, some of Nixon’s men met to decide on the official response to the McGovern nomination. Dick Moore and Chuck Colson came out against the president calling to congratulate McGovern on his victory. They also did not want the president to provide the customary national security briefing to the Democratic nominee, as

²⁹⁹ See the *Wall Street Journal*, July 12, 1972, 20.

³⁰⁰ McGovern is quoted in the *Wall Street Journal*, July 14, 1972, 3.

³⁰¹ Please see Chapter 1 for a full discussion of the Nixon’s “New American Majority” and Charles Colson’s winning strategy to go after the Catholic, “ethnic,” and hardhat northern industrial coalition. Richard Scammon is quoted in the *Wall Street Journal*, July 13, 1972, 23.

³⁰² See discussion of the night’s events in the *New York Times*, June 11, 1972, 75, 82, and the *Wall Street Journal*, July 14, 1972, 3. See also, Perlstein, *Nixonland*, 686- 689, 698-99, 701, 702.

³⁰³ Nixon, *RN*, 653.

Dwight Eisenhower had given Adlai Stevenson and Lyndon Johnson had given Richard Nixon. Colson and Moore had discussed a way to “preempt” this formality by having the president deliver a letter to McGovern on the morning after the nomination, offering congratulations, and indicating that either the Secretary of State or Defense would be made available later to brief the candidate on national security matters, rather than the president.³⁰⁴ Meanwhile in the Old Executive Office Building, the speechwriters, ties loosened, hammered away on their typewriters. In a memo entitled “The Making of an Extremist,” Pat Buchanan summed up the DNC in the agreed upon tone: “Miami Beach was not the victory for the common man; it was the triumph of the Porsche and Pucci Populists, the Park Avenue revolutionaries, the radical rich, the Marxists from the Philadelphia Main Line.”³⁰⁵

With McGovern as the quarry, Buchanan was working unrestrained on the talking points for the administration ahead of the fall campaign. The results of the Democratic convention had provided new energy to the backroom campaign team. In his brief for the White House and the surrogates, Buchanan wrote, “How did a Methodist preacher’s son from Middle America wind up as the national candidate and champion of the exotics, the extremists, and the radicals? How was the great Democratic Party of Wilson, Roosevelt, Truman and Kennedy hijacked by what Hubert Humphrey denounced as an ‘ideological elite,’ and a ‘haven for kooks and nuts?’” In his brief, Buchanan questioned how the Midwestern senator became “the hero of the purple sunglasses set and candidate of the Radical Chic?” The speechwriter and political strategist wanted it known that the senator has begun to live like a “Japanese feudal lord,” who “sports mod clothes and mod hair, lollygagging about his exotic mansion in sandals, \$15 Pucci ties, and Saville Row suits.” It was the line Buchanan was to continuously feed material on McGovern for Colson to use in the field as he saw fit.³⁰⁶ The message from the White House was that the Democratic Party’s “leadership consists of a so-called Prairie Populist who makes \$100,000-a-year, from Senate salary and ‘speaking engagements’ and is the only populist in America with a 19th century Japanese shrine in his living room.” Such was the tenor that imbued much of the campaign to come.³⁰⁷

Whereas the Nixon team had little trouble articulating the desired public perception of George McGovern, they were not always certain which image of the president to reveal for the campaign. What was certain was that Nixon certainly was not part of Buchanan’s purple sunglasses set, or a friend of the radical chic. Rather, as speechwriter Bill Safire elucidated, the “Nixon style” was “identification with ‘heartland qualities.’” In a June 1971 memorandum to Haldeman, as per his request, Safire laid out the president’s image. “The country is not divided up between elitists and squares, but taking a scale with those as extremes, the Nixon style unabashedly leans toward the square side,” Safire wrote. The writer maintained being a square was essentially a feather in the president’s cap. “He doesn’t wear funny hats,” and the only photograph of Nixon ever dancing was “at his daughter’s wedding.” In an obvious reference to a

³⁰⁴ See memorandum from Dwight Chapin to H.R. Haldeman, July 11, 1972, Chapin Papers, Box 20, NARA. The plan was that the morning after McGovern’s acceptance speech, Jeb Magruder would try to get as many papers around the nation to denounce the nomination and express their support for Nixon as president. The plan was to dampen the boost the Democrat would get coming out the convention. See Dwight Chapin to Jeb Magruder, July 6, 1972, WHSF, Contested Files, Box 34, Nixon Library.

³⁰⁵ See “The Making of an Extremist” talking paper, Buchanan Papers, Box 6, NARA.

³⁰⁶ Memorandum from Pat Buchanan to Charles Colson, September 13, 1972, Buchanan Papers, Box 2, NARA.

³⁰⁷ See “The Making of an Extremist” talking paper, Buchanan Papers, Box 6, NARA. But there were more practical matters to hit McGovern with, and that concerned Catholic voters. His plan to eliminate the income exemption for each member of the family would hurt larger Catholic families.

famous shot of President Kennedy surrounded by adoring bathers, the speechwriter suggested the difference between his boss and the late president was that, “You won’t see a ‘beefcake’ photo of him on a beach in a swarm of admirers.” At issue for Safire was that Richard Nixon could not pull it off even if he tried.

When an essentially undignified man strikes a dignified pose, the pretension shows through like potmetal through cheap silverplate. If Nixon were putting on an act, he would be ridiculed out of public life; the fact that not even his severest critics dispute the reality of his sense of dignity says something about the Nixon style and about the desire of most Americans for a genuine decorum in Presidential conduct. We capitalize the ‘p’ in President for good reason.³⁰⁸

In a memorandum written for the president in the days immediately following the 1970 midterm elections, Safire made it clear that he was not trying to create a persona for Nixon but that this was his analysis of the man in a political context. The speechwriter suggested that they should “dismiss the straw man of stridency and examine how best to portray the President as what he is.” Safire was clear that Nixon would never become “a beloved figure of benignity, and it would be a mistake to attempt to strike such a pose.” The president, he suggested, was “not a man who believes that national unity is a prerequisite to progress . . . ; his posture should be that of a man willing to fight for the kind of progress for which the time is ripe.” Safire warned that Nixon as the peoples’ representative, “must not play it so cool as to refuse to do battle for their interests, and those interests are controversial.” However, the speechwriter’s view on this important point was in the minority, as this was the Nixon of 1968 and 1970, as the consensus in the White House was that these days were over. The goal was to make Nixon less a fighter and more a dignified statesman in the White House, a departure from the raucous political behavior that the president was involved in during the midterm elections of 1970. The goal was to have the president appear presidential by allowing him to rise above his street fighting past. Safire didn’t like the move, believing that the nation wanted a fighting president. “All that can be heard among friends and foes alike is how the President must soften his image, return to being President and not candidate, lower his voice, stop shaking his fist. . . .”³⁰⁹ Going into 1972, however, Richard Nixon was to stay behind the scenes, he would throw no red meat, he would not shake his fist, and he would remain in the Oval Office “acting” like a president, as that was exactly what the clear majority of his loyal aides wanted him to do.

³⁰⁸ See Memorandum from Bill Safire to H.R. Haldeman, June 23, 1971, Ehrlichman Papers, Box 6, NARA, and Chapin Papers, Box 25.

³⁰⁹ Memorandum for the President from Bill Safire, November 11, 1970, Chapin Papers, Box 25, NARA.

CHAPTER 5

ABOVE THE BATTLE

The best tribute to what we have done, I think, came from McGovern I believe just after the convention when he said—"They've got fifteen guys shooting at me from all sides while the President's acting like he's not even in the campaign." If we can continue that we're golden.³¹⁰

It would have been easy to sympathize with George McGovern who emerged from his party's convention victorious and eager to strap on a helmet for a clash with Richard Nixon only to discover that the president had curiously left the field before the game began. In the election of 1972, Richard Nixon was indeed behaving as a man disconnected from his own campaign, squirreled away in the Oval Office while the machinery of electioneering ran on without him. Nixon's low profile—seemingly sequestered within the White House—was not due to an aversion to campaigning, an inability to talk to the American people, nor was it the result of the "Berlin Wall" Haldeman had allegedly constructed around the Oval Office. Instead, it was part of a concerted strategy that utilized a loyal staff and surrogates to mitigate the president's "unlikable qualities" while maximizing the reach of his political message among the heartland majority, taking his words directly to the voters. By early 1971, Nixon understood that while his politics might resonate in Middle America, the appeal of his old fighting persona had waned during his tumultuous first term in office and his profile in terms of national bedside manner was flatter than Kansas. The president's image, especially his perceived lack of charisma, was a long-standing issue, but before the mid-term elections of 1970, it had never been an issue considered serious enough to cripple his political cache and jeopardize his chances at the second term in the Oval Office. The conundrum, however, could be cured by a sophisticated political strategy. "We cannot and should not try to make the President something he isn't," personal aide Dwight Chapin wrote in a memorandum to Haldeman. "A President doesn't have to be likable, have a sense of humor or even like children. It is important *only* that his personal qualities engender confidence."³¹¹

Creating this sense of confidence in Richard Nixon heading into the reelection of 1972 by strategically restricting his public appearances has received scant attention in scholarly works. Even though it is known that the president rarely left the White House, this reality has not been connected to the election in any significant way or given (seemingly any) consideration as a strategy to win. The picture of the president's public separation from the campaign and the intensive and orchestrated use of surrogates to take the message to the people as part of a concerted plan in Richard Nixon's historic landslide election have failed to comprise a significant part in the historical record.³¹² Indeed, as this chapter will show, the inner circle's

³¹⁰ Memorandum from Pat Buchanan to H.R. Haldeman, Charles Colson, and John Ehrlichman, September 13, 1972, Buchanan Papers, Box 5, NARA.

³¹¹ Memorandum from Dwight Chapin to H.R. Haldeman, May 19, 1971, Haldeman Papers, Box 107, NARA. Emphasis added.

³¹² Although Stanley Kutler acknowledged that Nixon's incumbency aided in the "tactic of insulating Nixon from his campaign," and "built on the practices of 1968," he does not elaborate much beyond this point, other than to mention that the president's occasional "Ceremonial Rose garden appearances and other activities kept Nixon in the public spotlight, looking 'presidential.'" See Kutler, *Wars of Watergate*, 197. Media outlets, however, reported this on more than one occasion, pointing out that the president's men were engaged in a deliberate strategy to keep the politician in the Oval Office. Please see the *Washington Post*, November 6, 1972, A23; Stewart Alsop's column in

plan to mitigate the president's more unlikable qualities by sequestering the politician in the White House was not only quite pervasive but crucial to the history of that watershed political event. Indeed, President Nixon's demeanor during this period prior to Watergate has resulted in the opposite effect—one that views such behavior as further evidence of his isolation behind a “German wall” inside the Oval Office.

No one in the inner circle danced around the image issue with the president; Nixon was not sexy, charismatic, even warm, and although the talented White House staff writers could lather honey on a turnip it would remain a turnip. “As you know we have tried hard for 3 years to project ‘color’ about you, to portray the human side of the President, the personal warmth, the compassionate, considerate qualities you have,” Colson suggested in a memo to the president of the United States. While Colson was loyal to the bone, he wasn’t stupid. Like others, he knew the team needed to try something else.³¹³

Few within earshot of the Oval Office were slow on their feet, and the more intense their loyalty to the president the greater was their likelihood to engage in these types of conversations. Chapin, the handsome, discreet, and trusted personal aide, sat down with the president in the Oval Office to deal with just this issue in January 1972. Following the conversation, Chapin drafted a memorandum for Haldeman with a message intended for maximum dissemination. “The President expects to keep the lowest of political profiles through the Convention,” Chapin wrote to Nixon’s chief of staff. The plan was for a “low-key” approach, a “tone” that “should be expected from everyone at the White House.” Additionally, Chapin explained that since it was the president’s understanding that their political opponents would bring the fight to “the Oval Office door,” the immediate response from the White House needed to “underplay” the counterattack. “We must fight but we must fight in a way which is most conducive to keeping the President on the highest plane possible. We do not have to get into a bunch of gun fighting and we should not.” Of importance in the meeting for what was to come was the question Nixon put forth for his staff. Nixon asked Chapin to solicit the feedback from staff concerning “the White House posture during the coming year.” While complimenting the talent of his “outstanding team,” Nixon stressed to Chapin that his plan to keep out of the political fight was a ploy that needed to be kept secret. “The President can attempt to keep his nonpolitical profile but if stories generate from the White House about our political orientation and our deep involvement in the campaign it can only serve to undermine that which the President is trying to accomplish.” This was not a request, but marching orders for his loyal team. “The President is keeping the political profile at the White House at the lowest possible point. He has demanded from the staff that the business of government be paramount, and that is the policy which we are all following.”³¹⁴ Nixon had on his mind historic trips to China, the Soviet Union, and shepherding through a peace deal in Southeast Asia. During the election year, he would play his coveted role as “statesman,” and let his troops fight the political wars.

Newsweek, July 17, 1972, 84; and Don Oberdorter’s “Above the battle” article in the *Washington Post*, January 16, 1972, A1, A14.

³¹³ Memorandum from Charles Colson to the President, January 19, 1972, WHSF, Contested Files, Box 3, Nixon Library.

³¹⁴ Memorandum from Dwight Chapin to H.R. Haldeman, January 19, 1972, following discussions with Nixon. The subject was a briefing for the General Staff Meeting. Please see Haldeman Papers, Box 176, NARA.

Inside his large wood-paneled office, the president's loyal chief of staff put pen to paper, the young women in the White House secretarial pool turned these orders into typed memorandums, and the presidential directives went out to dozens of offices. On June 12 and June 27, 1972, Haldeman sent out high priority communications to all those in the administration, including the cabinet and the White House staff. The purpose of the orders was to comply with Nixon's query to have everyone involved in the reelection effort offer their opinion on what the president's position should be between conventions and then during the fall campaign. Within days, Haldeman's inbox overflowed with responses, all containing one clear and consistent message: the president must stay above the political battles to come in the election of 1972. "The President should keep being 'President' just as long as he possibly can," staffer Ken Cole wrote. "I think that it is important to convey the image of the President being in Washington 'running the country' while others are out campaigning....The President should not attack anyone for anything during the campaign. This should be left to the surrogates. He should at all times be the statesman who has brought peace to the world and economic stability to our country." As far as the political fight was concerned, "the President should stay above all of this."³¹⁵ Several respondents suggested that Nixon should assume a position not possible for McGovern. John C. Whitaker believed that between July and November, Nixon should just be the president, and "meet with international leaders" and do the things that "McGovern can't." The role of statesman did not gibe with hard knuckled electioneering. The message was that campaigning in any traditional manner was out. On the part of the president, there needed to be a "low-risk campaign." As Whitaker cautioned, "Don't do any large political rallies—not one" and "don't engage in any debates."³¹⁶ John Scali suggested that Nixon should be "High-level, statesmanlike, tending to the business of running the government."³¹⁷ Peter Flannigan echoed the dangers of campaigning. "The President's posture between the conventions should be that of 'President.' In my view he would be doing his candidacy a great disservice by engaging in political activity during that period."³¹⁸

Several others suggested there be a seamless blending of the suggested posture between the campaigns and the campaign trail. Bryce Harlow was one among many that thought that Nixon should remain out of the political arena even after the conventions. "I would greatly regret any move so to elevate politicking between now and, say, October 1 as [it] would reawaken the notion that the President would rather be a domestic party leader than a world statesman." But even after the convention, the aide stressed his hope that when the campaign began, "the shrillness and *ad hominem* stuff" would be left to vice president Spiro Agnew and "John Mitchell's minions, leaving the President as free as possible to be Presidential far more than political." This was all based on Harlow's "premise that a Presidential stance will prove to be the best politics." Fascinating was the idea that Nixon's public aversion to politics was chiefly and strategically political. Any pretense to a courteous democratic process by the president was purely for public consumption. As the White House staff knew, the "campaign will be very dirty before it is over," and because of this, having Nixon maintain "a Presidential stance throughout" while personally practicing "a dignified and thoughtful campaign" would "confirm the public

³¹⁵ Memorandum from Ken Cole to H.R. Haldeman, June 19, 1972, WHSF, Contested Files, Box 20, Nixon Library.

³¹⁶ Memorandum from John Whitaker to H.R. Haldeman July 21, 1972, WHSF, Contested Files, Box 8, Nixon Library.

³¹⁷ Memorandum from John Scali to H. R. Haldeman, June 29, 1972, WHSF, Contested Files, Box 20, Nixon Library.

³¹⁸ Memorandum from Peter Flannigan to H.R. Haldeman, June 16, 1972, WHSF, Contested Files, Box 20, Nixon Library.

judgment that the President is determined above all else to do only the right things for America.” Harlow, like others, concluded that such a strategy would mean not only a “victory in November, but also the road to a landslide.”³¹⁹

As Harlow had so clearly indicated, staffers aware of Nixon’s long political career were concerned that a fist-waving Dick Nixon would not be the image that the White House would want to project if it intended to recapture the Oval Office. Presidential speechwriter Ray Price agreed on the question of image. Nixon would need to “be President first and candidate second. Remember at all times that he comes across to the public more sympathetically and more positively as President than as a campaigner. Keep campaign travel limited, and do as few rallies as possible...; remain Presidential; resist the temptation to respond in kind to the attacks that will be made.”³²⁰ Fears abounded that this effort would be interpreted as another false image of Nixon. As Bill Carruthers suggested to Haldeman, although Nixon “should maintain his Presidential posture,” he warned that this has been “*misconstrued* as being abstract, private and secretive.”³²¹ Press secretary Ronald Ziegler did not feel that such a stance was insincere, as “The posture exists because it is *his* posture. It is present because of his accomplishments as a statesman both in his widely approved foreign initiatives and in the less appreciated domestic initiatives.”³²²

The partisan grinders were all lock-in-step with this view, especially in what they thought was the sure miss-match between the President of the United States and upstart George McGovern. The director of the Economic Stabilization Program and cabinet member, Donald Rumsfeld, believed that given the situation, Nixon did not have to “engage in partisan activities.” Faced with this Democratic nominee, the president could simply “use the platform and power of the office to show a President governing—let the distinction be drawn between a partisan Democratic office seeker versus an incumbent President governing.”³²³ Al Haig agreed, suggesting to Haldeman that “the President’s posture should be one of a statesman who is above the frantic gut-fighting and politicking of the campaign.” Rather than engaging McGovern, Nixon should “pursue a strategy totally consistent with that of a self-confident, competent statesman who is above frantic political campaigning. This means that his travel and public appearances should be carefully contrived.”³²⁴ Foreign trips, like the one he took to China, had been in the works for years and were not among the appearances that brought concern.³²⁵ It was the political appearances that were to be sharply managed and curtailed. Such a strategy also meant that the team never really trusted their boss’s ability to stay on message in public for any length of time.

His loyalists also wanted to quash any discussion of the president’s image in the media by keeping the level of discussion as surrogates versus McGovern. The goal was to take away

³¹⁹ Memorandum from Bryce Harlow to H.R. Haldeman, June 16, 1972, WHSF, Contested Files, Box 20, Nixon Library.

³²⁰ Memorandum from Ray Price to H.R. Haldeman, June 16, 1972, WHSF, Contested Files, Box 20, Nixon Library.

³²¹ Memorandum from Bill Carruthers to H.R. Haldeman, June 14, 1972, WHSF, Contested Files, Box 20, Nixon Library.

³²² Memorandum from Ronald Ziegler to H.R. Haldeman, June 12, 1972, WHSF, Contested Files, Box 20, Nixon Library. Emphasis added.

³²³ Memorandum from Donald Rumsfeld to H.R. Haldeman June 16, 1972, WHSF, Contested Files, Box 20, Nixon Library.

³²⁴ Memorandum from Alexander Haig, to H.R. Haldeman, June 20, 1972, WHSF, Contested Files, Box 20, Nixon Library.

³²⁵ MacMillan, *Nixon in China*, 5, 20.

attention from the discussions of the president's character by focusing all of their energies on surrogates attacking the image of their Democratic opponent. While Henry Dent agreed that Nixon should present the image of the "professional President working to solve national and international problems" between the conventions, and during the fall, "humility and dignity" must hold sway "with the President ignoring the enemy." Dent, as with fellow staffers, maintained McGovern should be attacked below the presidential level. Indeed, not only should any "campaigning by the President" avoid being "very partisan" and "local ticket entanglements," but "all the attacking should be done by the surrogates and others." This would be part of a "strategy . . . to lay the McGovern statements, policies and record on the line through speakers and advertising." Thus the senator from South Dakota would appear as "the advocate of surrender, weakness, gross welfarism, and appeaser of lawless elements."³²⁶

What it meant was a well-planned and concerted surrogate program from all levels of the administration aimed at McGovern from the convention floor until the November election. As Ken Clawson pointed out, while a "high level Presidential posture is still the most valid," it would only matter if "all 100 plus surrogates and, for that matter, the whole government apparatus is campaigning like hell from this moment until election day." The aide suggested that, "Every effort should be made to isolate McGovern's more vocal backers from the mainstream of the Democratic Party and the nation as a whole."³²⁷ Veteran press man Herbert Klein believed that the best way to isolate their foe was to make the American public afraid of the Democratic leader, much like Lyndon Johnson's men had made Americans fear Barry Goldwater in 1964. "We should make the public fear a McGovern Presidency in much the same way that they feared a Goldwater Presidency," namely by pointing out the challenger's "extreme" views. "We should try to nail him *as soon as possible* on his radical positions. . . to cement the identification of him with positions that are perceived as radical, scary or hairbrained. . . to plant the impression that he too readily embraces schemes that have been only half-thought through; that he's not only radical, but imprudent, and therefore not to be trusted with the power of the Presidency."³²⁸

This, of course, was already well underway on Buchanan's typewriter and disseminated to those close to the president inside the White House. The goal of this emerging plan remained that none of the attacks would come from Nixon, but through the surrogate speakers across the country. Klein believed this strategy was a winner. With the president spending "most of his time emphasizing the positive" and meeting "the attack by staying above it, I think we gain."³²⁹ When there was a differing opinion, it was clear that it was not particularly welcome anywhere near the Oval Office. "What is the lesson for 1972? It is *not* that the President should blitz the country as he did in 1960 to avoid the complacency which almost led to Humphrey's victory in 1968," Doug Hallett wrote. "On the other hand, it is not that he should remain above and beyond the battle—remain Presidential is the way Ray Price would put it." To which Haldeman scrawled in the margin: "No" and then in a hard scrawl, "*Above battle*."³³⁰

³²⁶ Memorandum from Henry Dent to H.R. Haldeman, June 16, 1972, WHSF, Contested Files, Box 20, Nixon Library.

³²⁷ Memorandum from Ken Clawson to H.R. Haldeman through L. Higby, July 22, 1972, WHSF, Contested Files, Box 8, Nixon Library.

³²⁸ Memorandum from Herbert Klein to H.R. Haldeman, June 16, 1972, WHSF, Contested Files, Box 20, Nixon Library.

³²⁹ Memorandum from Herbert Klein to H.R. Haldeman, June 17, WHSF, Contested Files, Box 20, Nixon Library.

³³⁰ Memorandum from Doug Hallett to H.R. Haldeman, June 28, 1972, WHSF, Contested Files, Box 7, Nixon Library. Emphasis added.

Others also were not so sure about this prevailing wisdom. Although firebrand-loyalist Pat Buchanan saw the benefit of protecting the president from the fight, his personality certainly contributed to his desire for more “flexibility” in the team’s approach, one that would depend on Nixon’s position in the polls. However, even the political strategist agreed the president should “hold off vigorous campaigning for as late as possible.” The conservative wordsmith always thought that the media would force the team to swing its sword. Although Buchanan believed it was important to “avoid stridency and nastiness and partisanship,” he was realistic enough to know that “some of this is certain to creep in late in the campaign” because members of the media in Washington are “intolerant of our attacks where it is indulgent of the opposition’s.” Buchanan suggested to Haldeman that the best he thought they could do was to “keep our cool as long as possible.”³³¹ Nixon loyalist Dwight Chapin also did not feel it was natural to keep the president completely under wraps: While it was fine to continue a “non-political approach” and “remain every bit the President,” after October 1, they should allow Nixon to “break loose. The President will want to campaign hard and should. The obvious which everyone will say is, the President should maintain his Presidential posture—but that does not mean he can’t swing hard and be his toughest self.”³³²

Speechwriter Bill Safire was well aware of the flurry of memorandums within the White House, and did not particularly like where it was all heading. “You will be receiving all sorts of memos revealing the wisdom the President acting like a President...and I will not belabor the point.” Rather Safire warned that Nixon ran the risk of acting “so Presidential as to be out of touch....Nixon’s greatest danger is to disappear into the high clouds.”³³³ But the scribe did not represent the consensus. As Nixon loyalist Robert Finch stated, “In my mind, there is no question but that the President should remain ‘the president’ not only between conventions but during the campaign.” The presidential surrogates could go after the disaffected voters, which included, “tax conscious, elderly, Jews, labor, and the South.” It was important that “the ‘non-political’ non-credible, cross country jaunts that President Johnson took in 1964 and 1966 should be avoided.” Instead, he, like others, believed it was preferable for the Administration to attack McGovern head-on by driving “home the cost and froth of his proposals and push him categorically into far left field.” Finch argued that they could then “turn the onslaught in the ‘McGovern crusade’ into a landslide for the President.”³³⁴

But not all of this felt right to the man sitting behind the finely carved desk in the Oval Office. Even though it was Nixon who suggested to Chapin the strategy of staying above the political fight as the best way to win, the thought ran against his innate instinct for battle, one that he had honed for the previous quarter century. “The 1972 presidential election, with its landslide result, should have been the most gratifying and fulfilling of all my campaigns,” Nixon wrote in his memoirs. “Instead it was one of the most frustrating and, in many ways, the least satisfying of all.” Nixon complained that he would have preferred waging political war against opponents that he believed were more worthy, including Humphrey, Muskie, and Teddy Kennedy, all of whom he believed would have made “formidable” opponents. Nixon admitted

³³¹ Memorandum from Pat Buchanan to H.R. Haldeman, June 18, 1972, WHSF, Contested Files, Box 20, Nixon Library.

³³² Memorandum from Dwight Chapin to H.R. Haldeman June 14, 1972, WHSF, Contested Files, Box 20, Nixon Library.

³³³ Memorandum from Bill Safire to H.R. Haldeman, June 14, 1972, WHSF, Contested Files, Box 20, Nixon Library.

³³⁴ Memorandum from Robert Finch to H.R. Haldeman, June 16, 1972, WHSF, Contested Files, Box 20, Nixon Library.

disbelief that the Democrats chose the senator from South Dakota, thinking to the last minute that they would change their minds and draft Kennedy. “Only after McGovern was nominated did I accept the fact that I was virtually assured of re-election without having to wage much of a campaign. . . . Against McGovern, however, it was clear that the less I did, the better I would do.” Here Nixon admitted that his perception as eager candidate in the public would have risked his edge as an incumbent over a long shot candidate. This passage also reveals Nixon’s internal struggle over the strategy to rein himself in from the political fight during the reelection campaign. The president recalled that keeping out of the action was contrary to his nature: “This was a totally unaccustomed situation for me, and it was not one in which I felt particularly comfortable or even knew instinctively what was best to do.”³³⁵

Instinct or not, the practical matters had been explained to the president in no uncertain terms in Key Biscayne, Florida, following the 1970 mid-term debacle. It was also important that Nixon had heard much of this from trusted political ally, John Mitchell. The Attorney General had advised the president to run a “front-porch” campaign from the White House, which, as columnist Stewart Alsop pointed out, was the “best of all front porches.” Others had recognized that the strategy of keeping the president above the fray did not sit comfortably for the career politician. “For an old war-horse, it is not easy to stay in the stable,” Alsop noted in his column. “The party faithful always want to be thrown red meat, and red meat used to be a Nixon specialty.”³³⁶

There were, however, other Nixon strengths beyond fist shaking and yelling at anti-war protestors on which to hang his political hat. As early as July 1971, Haldeman sent out a “high priority” memorandum for the entire staff entitled “Key Issues of 1972.” Colson responded that the public should have “three perceptions of the President by the fall of 1972.” These would be that Nixon was a “man of peace,” one who was getting the nation out of a war while “building a generation of peace.” Nixon was a “strong president” both “courageous” and “tough,” combined with one who is “dignified” and displaying “high moral purpose.” Of course, the high moral purpose was the ongoing framing of ending the Vietnam War with “peace with honor,” bringing home all POWS, and refusing to consider amnesty for draft violators. They knew that these issues would also play well with their target groups: farmers, senior citizens, conservative labor “hard hats, Teamsters and Longshoremen,” and veterans.³³⁷ Speechwriter Ray Price maintained that Nixon should be viewed as a “professional president” meaning that he be seen as a “statesman,” “hardworking” and “respected.” Above all he will make Americans proud of their domestic achievements and of his position as a “peacemaker” to the world.³³⁸

Naturally, the team knew as well as any that Americans had reacted favorably to his trip to China and a thawing of relations with the Soviet Union. Donald Rumsfeld, clearly thinking of the president’s tricky Dickey history, wrote that the president must take strides to appear sincere and credible. “RN must come across as believable—honest with the people. If he is seen as deceitful, misleading or less than candid in his dealings with the public, the Congress or the media, nothing the Administration says or does will be credible or have impact.” Rumsfeld cautioned that the president and his team should “avoid being uptight and secretive.” Like others, Nixon’s perceptions of strength must reside in his successes in foreign affairs and dealing with

³³⁵ Nixon, *RN*, 665.

³³⁶ See Stewart Alsop’s column in *Newsweek*, July 17, 1972, 84.

³³⁷ Memorandum from Charles Colson to H.R. Haldeman, July 6, 1971, Haldeman Papers, Box 107, NARA.

³³⁸ Memorandum from Raymond Price to H.R. Haldeman, July 1, 1971, Haldeman Papers, Box 107, NARA.

social unrest and law and order at home.³³⁹ Bill Safire reaffirmed that presidential courage was important, that Nixon “cannot be pushed around by Russians or Congress,” as he proved he could be tough and fair in foreign policy dealings not only in Vietnam but in Moscow and Beijing. Thus, according to Safire, he was much more like a “Theodore Roosevelt and Harry Truman than Eisenhower or Kennedy.” To identify with working people in the heartland, the president needed to be portrayed as “hardworking.” Nixon’s weakest point, Safire wrote, was his inability to generate idol-like excitement, but his image as a family man was his “big strength.”³⁴⁰ Herbert Klein agreed, adding that Nixon’s strength would come from someone who is a “decisive leader,” a man who “makes big decisions” and one who understands problems both foreign and domestic that are “best for the country.” Like Safire, Nixon as a “family man” was a winner with many Americans including women. As Klein wrote, Nixon’s “regular guy” image was like Harry Truman’s, in that he was also “tough-minded.”³⁴¹

In order to get that “regular guy” out into the heartland, the president and his team relied inordinately on thirty-five special surrogates or “surrogate candidates” to speak on his behalf at campaign appearances throughout the nation. The material for these speakers came up through Pat Buchanan’s attack organizations and through the campaign machinery before delivery to the surrogates in an operation coordinated by the omnipresent Charles Colson. The ultimate goal was to attack George McGovern.³⁴² As early as November 1971, the planning for taking the president out of the day-to-day electioneering was well under way with Haldeman’s staff. Memos sent by the chief of staff indicated the need to prepare material and have it available early for staff, surrogates, and Cabinet members; including everything from speeches to “thoughtful by-liners.” This would need to occur throughout the administration. As Ray Price suggested to Haldeman, the belief was that since the president felt “he shouldn’t deliver speeches with substantial or sophisticated thought content, it’s doubly important that the rest of us do more of this,” to which Haldeman responded, “good idea.” The plan was sent down early to the writers including Pat Buchanan that they were to take the president’s case to the people. “Since . . . [the president] feels he can’t do it himself . . . it would be good for the writers—giving them a chance to flex their intellectual muscles . . . and thus to keep the juices of thought—and of thoughtful analysis—running.”³⁴³

These “juices of thought” did not appear with the wave of a magic wand, but from hours of work with sleeves rolled up past the elbows in the often sweltering conditions of the Old Executive Building across the street from the White House. There, Mort Alin, with a small staff of four aided by a core of eight female volunteers or “clipping ladies” poured over hundreds of newspapers, magazines, television shows, films, and news ticker sheets gathered from across the nation. Each day the staff prepared a brief for Buchanan, and the speechwriter along with his two aides disseminated all the relevant material, created files, and prepared reports for his daily White House briefings for the senior staff. Buchanan’s files were full of clips from news articles, many underlined, which subsequently ran through the political machine, up to the president, and back out as talking points for the surrogates and Buchanan’s own media leaks to the press. The strategist also provided oversight, assistance, and “checks” on various attack operations and their

³³⁹ Memorandum from Donald Rumsfeld to H.R. Haldeman July 1, 1971, Haldeman Papers, Box 107, NARA.

³⁴⁰ Memorandum from Bill Safire to H.R. Haldeman, July 1, 1971, Haldeman Papers, Box 107, NARA.

³⁴¹ Memorandum from Ken Klein to H.R. Haldeman July 2, 1971, Haldeman Papers, Box 107, NARA.

³⁴² Spear, *The Presidents and the Press*, 185.

³⁴³ Memorandum from Ray Price to H.R. Haldeman, November 5, 1972, Haldeman Papers, Box 154, NARA. See also several Haldeman staff and talking point memos from January 1972, Haldeman Papers, Box 153, NARA.

effectiveness in the media; helped to create television and radio spots, pamphlets and flyers; monitored their distribution points and the news summary operations; recommended general shifts in strategy; helped draft speeches and covert materials; and oversaw updates for the briefing books. The summary for all of this was fuel for the campaign fire. The most important part of Buchanan's efforts was managing the surrogate strategy and, as he put it, "avoid at all costs the kind of 'attack' by individuals or media or ad that opens us to the 'Tricky Dick' charge or the 'Old Gunfighter' allegation." The strategist knew that both the media and the Democrats would be looking for an opportunity. "And if caught at it, we will have ourselves a problem."³⁴⁴

During the campaign, "problems" were plentiful, and the team's efforts to handle the surrogates constituted a constant tussle within the inner group. As far back as April, Colson was at odds with several of the White House staffers, including Jeb Magruder, over the operation's progress and this continued through the summer and fall. In typical fashion, Colson's strong-arm tactics reverberated throughout the ranks. Dick Howard was concerned that these issues could easily get out of control resulting in the team taking its eye off the ball. "As you probably determined there is some thrashing going on between Colson and Magruder over surrogate scheduling," Howard wrote in a memo to David Parker. "[Dick] Chapin and I sat in on a meeting between the two and all I could get out of it was that there was no agreement." When Colson was involved, it usually meant trouble. Howard wanted something done "since this mole hill is growing into a mountain rapidly."³⁴⁵

The aide knew how the lay of the land in 1972 had changed and how Colson, perhaps next to Haldeman himself, was the power on the White House staff. Howard's memorandum spoke to a changing tide in the hallways outside the Oval Office. "In '70 when you and I were involved we had an entirely different situation. We *had* the clout of the White House and I know this made the difference in many, if not most cases." Howard explained that given the circumstances, Magruder's positions on surrogate scheduling would probably not have a chance of gaining a voice, but he tried to play the role of diplomat with the deputy campaign manager and the touchy political issue over who was really in control over campaign details: The CREEP operations at 1701 Pennsylvania Avenue or the Colson operation at the White House. "I would appreciate your comments on my recommendations, as well as whether I have represented your position correctly and fully. If not, I am willing to add your additional arguments, but I don't think I can change my recommendations," Howard wrote. He did promise Magruder, however, that he would "try to hold back the horses" at the White House until he heard back from him. "And if you want to talk about it, I am even willing to respect your territorial rights and come to your office."³⁴⁶

Charles Colson, however, did not respect anyone's territorial rights. Nixon's special counsel rapidly became the bullwhip for the reelection campaign within the White House, and he was not going to let any of the department staffers forget it. By the beginning of June, Colson was in full attack mode. When Bruce Kehrli suggested that staffers could take some time off in the summer to recharge for the fall, Colson as usual pounced. "I am staggered...It is inapplicable to anyone on the Colson operation in any way, shape or form and I would hope that it would be

³⁴⁴ Attack Organization and Strategy Memorandum from Pat Buchanan and Ken Khachigian to John Mitchell, March 14 1972, Haldeman Papers, Box 97, NARA. See also White, *The Making of the President 1972*, 262.

³⁴⁵ Memorandum from Richard Howard to Dave Parker, April 24, 1972, Howard Papers, Box 3, NARA.

³⁴⁶ Memorandum from Richard Howard to Jeb Magruder April 17, 1972, Howard Papers, Box 3, NARA.

equally inapplicable to other parts of the White House. I can't believe that you are really encouraging any vacations this summer. There are 148 days between now and [the] election."³⁴⁷

Colson's ever-increasing involvement in operations in both the White House and at CREEP not only made many uneasy, but complicated divisions and tensions already ingrained in the various operations. Passionate turf wars and personality conflicts made for a tense internal dynamic inside the campaign machinery. There were numerous clashes between the White House and the CREEP operations at 1701 Pennsylvania Avenue, where the former continuously found fault with the operations across the street. For those in the White House operation, the notion of any interference from 1701 was a constant irritant, especially when CREEP tried to repackage its message. This was especially the case when the White House complained that the letter operations that it ran through 1701 had to be halted because they were deemed "too negative." These letters, some ending up as "letters to the editor" in selected cities, had strategists like Buchanan displeased with the manner in which CREEP had repackaged the message and was mixing the positive White House image with the negative aspect of the campaign. "The letters don't go out on 1701 stationary. . .the tendency to fold the letters operation into the overall strategy is not wise, because of the nature of the letters, and because this should be a negative function."³⁴⁸

There were many layers to the friction between camps. Haldeman was often intensely critical of his own deputy that he placed over in CREEP to keep tabs and report to him on the daily operations. The chief of staff did not like many of Magruder's ideas, especially when he learned that the deputy campaign manager had asked for permission to send out direct mail over the president's signature. Gordon Strachan had written to Haldeman stressing that he believed such letters were "a mistake. It raises the President's campaign profile too high. It demeans the Presidency." When Haldeman saw Magruder's forwarded request, he circled it in a wide arch, writing in large bold letters, "*NO!*"³⁴⁹ As far back as January, Haldeman was wary of Magruder's work, especially in his abilities as a spokesperson for the campaign. In a terse memo to Magruder's boss John Mitchell (which he also ccd to Magruder), the chief of staff laid out his feelings. "In spite of the outstanding job that Jeb is obviously doing in many phases of the organization of the campaign structure, it seems to me that he is exactly the wrong guy to be used as a spokesperson for the campaign. My personal view would be that Jeb should discontinue his present practice of holding press interviews, TV interviews, etc., and should become totally the man behind the scenes. Otherwise he's going to destroy his usefulness."³⁵⁰

These internal divisions and rivalries were exacerbated by the campaign strategy to separate the positive Nixon from the negative Nixon. Marshalling and organizing the troops for battle required a careful balancing act between preparing for an assault on McGovern and the Democrats while keeping the guns pointed outside their tent. The plan was to avoid soiling their boss during the political carnage to come. As Ken Clawson pointed out to Haldeman, "There also has to be a counterattack mechanism throughout the campaign, which I presume would be handled by Colson in collaboration with John Mitchell." While Clawson could "see great value" in this operation, he warned the president's chief of staff "this is obviously one of the more

³⁴⁷ Memorandum from Charles Colson to Bruce Kehrli, June 12, 1972, Colson Papers, Box 131, NARA.

³⁴⁸ Memorandum from Pat Buchanan to H.R. Haldeman, July 26, 1972, Contested Files, WHSF, Box 1, Nixon Library.

³⁴⁹ Memorandum from Gordon Strachan to H.R. Haldeman, July 17, 1972, WHSF, Contested Files, Box 34, Nixon Library.

³⁵⁰ "Confidential/Eyes Only" Memorandum from H.R. Haldeman to John Mitchell, January 17, 1972, Haldeman Papers, Box 199, NARA.

ticklish areas—where the President could beat himself—and should be most carefully controlled.”³⁵¹ While there was hope that all political activities would be “handled entirely at 1701,” no one (perhaps not even the president) could completely control the extent of Colson’s growing operations; there was no escaping the dangers of political subterfuge.³⁵² While Nixon planned (at least publicly) to wage a “limited campaign” from the White House, even he could not manage all the unleashed energy that he needed from those whom he trusted most in his inner circle.³⁵³

One of the most difficult challenges of the surrogate program was determining the role of the vice president. Agnew occupied the slippery slope between the surrogate attack agenda and the White House that wished to stay on the high road and out of the mud. Referred to as “our gun,” the reelection team wanted to use Agnew, but worried about his reputation as something akin to an old and unstable ordinance that could explode without warning.³⁵⁴ Indeed, there had been serious talk that the vice president might not even make it on the ticket in the summer of 1972. That Nixon might have dumped his controversial vice president complicated a coherent plan for his campaign role. In a Buchanan/Khachigian memo to John Mitchell, they suggested that based on the “assumption Vice President Agnew is our man” there would have to be “two top speechwriters” on his plane with direct communication capability to 1701 and the attack briefing book. As they believed, the “election of 1970 demonstrated that V.P. Agnew can get more coverage than any Vice President in history; that makes tremendous copy; he will be the bayonet of the Administration in 1972.” The problem, though, was at times that bayonet cut both ways, and the White House was becoming nervous of Spiro Agnew turned loose.³⁵⁵ Everyone in the inner circle knew that the vice president liked to fire up the base of the Republican Party, and that George McGovern proved to be an easy way to achieve his ends. Agnew maintained that if the Democrats chose the senator from South Dakota, it would lead to the “downfall of our great republic.” On more than one occasion, the vice president had referred to McGovern as an outright “fraud.”³⁵⁶

Haldeman had warned Buchanan that the vice president had to be handled carefully. “We need some heavy thinking regarding the Vice President’s role and how he should play it if he is the nominee for reelection. We should determine first how he can help, and second, how he can avoid hurting the prospects for the ticket.” Haldeman believed with good reason that Buchanan’s political temperament made him the one person who could communicate with Agnew. “We need your strategy views on this, but we also need you to talk with the Vice President, try to get him to stop the swipes at the *New York Times*, and so forth, and also to avoid the personal attacks on McGovern as you suggest in your latest memorandum.”³⁵⁷

Ten days later on July 23, Buchanan sent a memorandum to the president regarding his original request on how to handle Agnew during the campaign. Following Haldeman’s lead,

³⁵¹ Memorandum from Ken Clawson to H.R. Haldeman, June 17, 1972, WHSF, Contested Files, Box 20, Nixon Library.

³⁵² Memorandum from Dwight Chapin to H.R. Haldeman, January 19, 1972, following discussions with Nixon. The subject was a briefing for the General Staff Meeting. Please see Haldeman Papers, Box 176, NARA.

³⁵³ Spear, *The Presidents and the Press*, 178.

³⁵⁴ Ehrlichman Oval Office Notes, June 9, 1972. Agnew is referred to as “our gun.” See Ehrlichman Papers, Box 6, NARA.

³⁵⁵ Memorandum Pat Buchanan and Ken Khachigian to John Mitchell, March 14, 1972, Haldeman Papers, Box 97, NARA.

³⁵⁶ See Stewart Alsop’s column in *Newsweek*, July 17, 1972, 84.

³⁵⁷ Memorandum from H.R. Haldeman to Pat Buchanan, July 13, 1972, Haldeman Papers, Box 153, NARA.

Buchanan asked to be the one to brief the VP on this. He realized that Agnew did not have many friends inside the White House. "Recognizing that there are many within the White House and the Hill who are not exactly enthusiasts of the Vice President, word should go forth that this is a 'team' effort, there should be no 'background' knocking of the Number Two man, who will be shouldering as RN did, much of the nasty workload of the party and the campaign." Buchanan pointed out that it was bad for morale as there was nothing more "embittering than to pull off the wire some holier-than-thou statement from a fellow Republican."³⁵⁸

This inside sniping at Agnew was a long-standing issue, and one that Bill Safire had previously complained about to the president, stressing that it had to stop for strategic reasons. "The VP doesn't need selling to his supporters, for he can do no wrong in their eyes; nor can he be forgiven by committed partisan Democrats he tagged with 'radical liberal.'" But to use the VP effectively, there was a need to stop treating him as the butt of jokes. "We must overcome the sloughing-off of him as a joke by some. The attack on him that would sway many people is not so much that he is a divider (the other side of that coin is that he is a scrapper and a fighter for his beliefs, which will gain him affection) but that he is ludicrous. So...no more jokes about him by other members of the Administration, even about golf." Rather, Safire believed that the vice president should be used to probe in a sober fashion "social concerns" such as the counterculture, apathy, elitism, intellectualism, and the role of the federal government. The plan was to make use of him while not embarrassing the campaign. "It may get a little boring, and it will not make the front pages . . . but it will fit philosophically and it will let some wounds heal...By 1972, he will be stronger than ever for a political campaign."³⁵⁹

Strong but manageable was the plan for Agnew in the fall. Buchanan's idea was to use the vice president in a practical manner and have him go after the Colson-driven coalition of middle class, white ethnic, hardhats, and Catholics. "The Vice President should be scheduled into those areas and among those groups that are the battleground in 1972. And that is *not* Republicans," Buchanan wrote. The chief political strategist laid it all out for the president. "We, by and large, have the South now. In the North, it is Catholic, ethnic, urban, Jewish, middle-income, working class Democrats who are the swing votes, the ones who will decide by how large a margin we will win this one, if we do win it."³⁶⁰ Haldeman remained concerned about the vice president, explaining the risk they ran with Agnew turning the media against them, and Nixon concurred. Haldeman noted in an Oval Office meeting with the president that they "must not make [the] VP the issue. Don't give [the press] ammunition." The idea stressed was that Agnew should not attack the press either but should "stay positive and on the issues."³⁶¹ The inner circle understood, though, that it was going to be tough to control, as when it came to "the dirty work" and the vice president, both Haldeman and Nixon knew that it was "his forte."³⁶² Buchanan had also realized that Agnew's combat with the press was an ongoing problem. As he wrote to the president, "Frankly, we need better press relations between the Vice President and the national and the local press. This might require a more conciliatory attitude on the part of the Veep's staff toward the traveling press."³⁶³

³⁵⁸ Memorandum from Pat Buchanan to the President, July 23, 1972, WHSF, Contested Files, Box 1, Nixon Library.

³⁵⁹ Memorandum from Bill Safire to the President, November 11, 1970, Chapin Papers, Box 25, NARA.

³⁶⁰ Memorandum from Pat Buchanan to the President, July 23, 1972, WHSF, Contested Files, Box 1, Nixon Library.

³⁶¹ Haldeman Oval Office hand written talking points, July 21, 1972, Haldeman Papers, Box 46, NARA.

³⁶² Haldeman Oval Office hand written talking points, July 25, 1972, Haldeman Papers, Box 46, NARA.

³⁶³ Memorandum from Pat Buchanan to the President, July 23, 1972, WHSF, Contested Files, Box 1, Nixon Library.

For all of their efforts, Agnew still got Buchanan and the president into trouble with the media with an inflammatory speech in front of the National Newspaper Association on July 22. In damage control mode, Buchanan spoke to reporters off the record, indicating that the president had ordered his men to play nice with the national press. However, Robert Semple's article in the *New York Times* indicated that on Nixon's orders the White House was doing damage control by ordering a stop to attacks on the media. The internal backlash was predictable as the tight control over the message was compromised. Buchanan backpedaled on his comments to Semple in a carefully worded memo to Haldeman. He suggested to the chief of staff that he should let the president know personally that "Buchanan was not the source of that Times story about RN directing a halt to press attacks," and that others had essentially leaked the quotes and information attributed directly to him in the article. In a memo to Haldeman, Buchanan tried to do the White House two-step, arguing on one hand that his position remained that they "ought consciously to hold back on sweeping attacks on the media" while covering his backside, indicating that he was on board in not giving the impression to the press and the public that Nixon had ordered a halt, as "it makes it appear that the President is master of the house who calls dogs on and off."³⁶⁴

Haldeman had warned his staff repeatedly about the media, that playing games with journalists would get their fingers burned. "Let's face a few facts—most of the media people are (1) against us and (2) suspicious of us. In the main, they are hard to fool although they often fool themselves . . . It is difficult for us to put anything over on them [and] it is practically impossible for us to subvert them." Haldeman's talking paper to staffers was blunt: "When we try a gimmick they usually are waiting at the entrance of the alley and they wind up making us look more devious [than] we are. This gives us a credibility problem . . . The media wind up being more suspicious of us than ever."³⁶⁵

Complementing decisions on Agnew's use were rumors that Nixon would replace him with veteran Texas politician John Connally. As a former Democrat, Connally's role as a campaign surrogate was enhanced by including his leadership with Democrats for Nixon. The chatter concerning the Texan as a possible replacement for Agnew on the ticket grew and is reflected in memos in early July where the talk was all about the vice president and speculation over Connally's role in the campaign. Because of the contacts and rumors that the former Texas governor was interested in the number two spot on the ticket, Colson and Haldeman were busy trying to feel out where the Texan stood concerning the vice presidency. Senior staff felt in "limbo," and as Colson wrote to Haldeman, they were not exactly sure "where Connally stands." What they did know was that he was "interested in his own future." According to Colson, he was "very anxious to know what the President wants from him in the way of future assignments, and in my opinion would jump at the prospect of being on the ticket this year." On the other hand, "If he assumes the chairmanship for Democrats for Nixon, he wants it to be a real campaign, well financed; he wants to play a major role and wants to be damn sure he has complete control in the areas for which he is responsible." In a private meeting with Colson, Connally tried to feel Colson out about the VP position but Nixon's special counsel said that he did not really know other than the president always kept his options open, "especially this President."³⁶⁶ Mere days

³⁶⁴ Memorandum from Pat Buchanan to H.R. Haldeman, August 14, 1972, Haldeman Papers, Box 101, NARA. See also Robert Semple's article in the *New York Times*, August 10, 1972, 24.

³⁶⁵ Haldeman talking paper, December 7, 1970, Haldeman Papers, Box 153, NARA.

³⁶⁶ Memorandums from Charles Colson to H.R. Haldeman, July 12, 1972, WHSF, Contested Files, Box 34, Nixon Library. Nixon referred to the Vice President as his "insurance policy" against physical harm "No assassin in his

later a Belden Texas poll failed to give a Nixon-Connally ticket much of a bump over Nixon-Agnew.³⁶⁷

Ten days later the administration announced that Agnew was staying on. In a press release, the Campaign Director for CREEP, Clark MacGregor, chalked it up to what the people wanted. “There is no doubt in my mind that if the need arose, Vice President Agnew would make an outstanding President. That a great many Americans share my view was demonstrated in the New Hampshire primary when more people chose to write in the Vice President’s name than voted for any other candidate except President Nixon himself.”³⁶⁸ The vice president, then, would be used, but it would be in a “controlled manner” for special projects. It was not long before the team had its first opportunity to rein in Agnew as George McGovern stumbled over his own choice for a running mate.

There were many mistakes and miscalculations that helped torpedo George McGovern’s campaign, but perhaps one of the most significant was his choice for vice president. The candidate’s selection from available Democrats was narrowed when Humphrey, Kennedy, Muskie, Gaylord Nelson, and Walter Mondale all turned McGovern down. Finally, the Democratic nominee looked to Missouri Senator, Tom Eagleton, who agreed to run on the ticket. Eagleton unfortunately failed to divulge his medical past to anyone in the McGovern camp, although it wasn’t long before McGovern had the senator’s medical records, documents that contained references to “suicidal tendencies” and “manic depression,” including the discovery that he was taking an anti-psychotic medication called Thorazine. Eagleton revealed that he was hospitalized three times between 1960 and 1966, and with the story set to break in the media, McGovern and the senator held a press conference to deal with the revelations that concerned electric-shock therapy treatments for depression. Such information was political dynamite and McGovern’s pronouncement that Eagleton was ready to “take on the presidency at a moment’s notice” sounded hollow. The night before the exposé on Eagleton broke, Nixon crony Murray Chotiner, who had been working to see what he could dig up, told Haldeman that Eagleton refused to release medical records and had denied charges of alcoholism. As Chotiner wrote, “It is great to know that he has ‘recovered’ from his ‘depressions’ and ‘fatigue.’” But as the long-time Nixon ally suggested, “the public is entitled to know all of the facts since he will be one heartbeat away from the Presidency if, by a mistake, McGovern is elected.” In a P.S. to Haldeman, Chotiner pointed out that he understood that “the Air Force will not accept a man for intelligence who has ever had psychiatric treatment.”³⁶⁹

right mind would kill me,” Nixon said to Ehrlichman with a laugh. “They know that if they did they would end up with Agnew.” By early summer 1972, it was John Mitchell who convinced Nixon to keep Agnew on the ticket. See Ehrlichman, *Witness to Power*, 122, 133.

³⁶⁷ Memorandum from Brad Hainsworth to Harry Dent, July 17, 1972, WHSF, Contested Files, Box 34, Nixon Library.

³⁶⁸ News from the Committee for the Re-election of the President, July 22, 1972, and Republican National Committee Press Release, July 22, 1972. Chapin had warned Haldeman of the political fallout of a protracted or messy public separation from Agnew. “If a Vice Presidential change is made it should be structured, if this is possible, so the least amount of political brutality is expanded on. A sloppy move here no matter how well planned will have serious consequences.” See memorandum from Dwight Chapin to H.R. Haldeman June 14, 1972, WHSF, Contested Files, Box 20, Nixon Library.

³⁶⁹ Memorandum from Murray Chotiner to H.R. Haldeman, WHSF, Contested Files, July 26, 1972, Box 34, Nixon Library.

McGovern's choice was savaged in the media, and despite the proclamation of his "1000 percent" support for Eagleton, the damage was done. On August 1, at McGovern's urging, the damaged senator withdrew from contention. Throughout the episode, Nixon was adamant that Vice President Agnew needed to tread carefully. Haldeman's word to Agnew and Mitchell was that the vice president "should take on McGovern and totally ignore Eagleton. It's important not to make the Vice President the issue. We should not give them ammunition. He should be hard-hitting on the issues, but should avoid becoming a subject of controversy." The approach was that the vice president needed to "contrast himself with Eagleton, who is a smart aleck. He should show dignity, stability, responsibility, avoid any clownish appearance, use a little humor to kid himself, but let the Democrats cut them up personally. The Vice President should stay on what McGovern has said and why it is dangerous."³⁷⁰ This in many ways defined the above ground legitimate campaign that was disciplined and made very few mistakes.

In some ways, all the Nixon team had to do was watch as McGovern looked weak and indecisive especially over questions of why he did not fully vet his choice for vice president. With his judgment questioned, McGovern began to slip in the polls. The immediate outcome for Nixon's men was that it made their plans for using Agnew that much easier. "As long as we maintain our lead and in light of the Eagleton fiasco, we should keep [Agnew] on positive issues and use him to attack the Democratic ticket only if it's absolutely necessary," Bob Teeter noted in a memorandum to Haldeman. "As long as the McGovern campaign continues to have problems and the press produces negative comment, we ought to seize the opportunity to make the Vice President a statesman." The view was that as long as the administration maintained a significant lead, Agnew "should be used primarily to reinforce our voters and to say complimentary things about the President that he cannot say himself."³⁷¹ In the end, George McGovern had inadvertently freed up another surrogate for Richard Nixon.

Indeed, the Eagleton affair provided a bonanza for the Nixon attack team and a feeding frenzy for members of the media. It also underscored how the press seldom laid a glove on the Nixon administration during the campaign while McGovern was taken to the shed on numerous occasions. The *Baltimore Sun*'s Nick Thimmesch was quite typical of the media's reaction to the Democratic Party's nominee. "He just does not seem to do things right," Thimmesch wrote. "Much of the public regards Senator McGovern as an unreliable fellow." Polling on the matter had one respondent suggest that it was McGovern that needed "the shock treatment," while another suggested, "one's crazy and the other talks crazy." According to Thimmesch, "Senator McGovern's problem . . . is that he talks big and righteous, and then takes it back by word and deed. He seems to eschew thoughtful reflection and planning." The columnist was fond of recalling how McGovern was so unsure of his selection of Eagleton that he wore unmatched shoes and "twitched" when the telephone rang. *Washington Post* columnist Joseph Kraft was even more withering on the Eagleton Affair. "The effort to dump Sen. Eagleton has been even

³⁷⁰ Memorandum from H.R. Haldeman for the president's file, July 21, 1972, POF, Box 89, NARA. This same note has the reference: "Regarding the '76 candidacy, there should be no discussion. The point is the job now is winning in '72." See also the memorandum from Pat Buchanan to the President, July 23, 1972, WHSF, Contested Files, Box 1, Nixon Library, where Buchanan stressed the need for the vice president to ignore Eagleton.

³⁷¹ Memorandum from Bob Teeter to H.R. Haldeman, August 3, 1972, Chapin, Box 23, NARA. Haldeman forwarded his memo to David Parker and Dwight Chapin. Also on the vice president, see Memorandum from Jeb Magruder to Charles Colson, June 13, 1972, a forward of a memorandum from Ken Rietz to Jeb Magruder of June 8, 1972, Colson Papers, Box 79, NARA. The belief was that the president and vice president must stay above the battle, and not become embroiled in "name calling."

more remarkable for ineptitude. Sen. McGovern has been exposed to the whole world in the process of changing his mind.” Kraft pointed out the long-term political problem for the nominee from South Dakota. “At the outset Sen. McGovern said he was ‘one thousand per cent behind’ Sen. Eagleton. One can hear that comment echoing ironically down through the months of the campaign as Sen. McGovern tries to demonstrate that he is for blue collar workers and blacks and Israel and others who doubt his support.” Kraft pointed out that McGovern’s fumbling underscored the “underlying doubt about the capacity of the left wing to run things.” But as Thimmesch suggested, the Eagleton affair by itself would not alone write off the candidate. Rather it was that the episode was reflective of “a whole list of Senator McGovern’s gaffes,” including his stand on abortion, national defense, marijuana use, amnesty, and Israel, and comparing Nixon to Hitler for his policies in Vietnam. And as the columnist rightly pointed out, “Senator McGovern’s credibility problem should be a joy to Mr. Nixon and his campaign staff.”³⁷²

Veteran journalist Stewart Alsop readily reprinted slams against McGovern in his column, seemingly amused by the manner in which Republicans went after the senator from South Dakota. This included reprinting the suggestion from the Republican National Committee’s publication *First Monday*, that if McGovern became president, it would “open the White House to riotous street mobs.”³⁷³

Despite the blather against the media from Haldeman and Colson, they understood the value of maintaining friendly contacts in the press, especially maintaining “good relations with those reporters and columnists” critical of the Democratic nominee, so they could continue to write stories that “needle” McGovern at every opportunity. According to Colson these included McGovern critics Evans and Novak and Nick Thimmesch.³⁷⁴ Nixon, though, prodded his staff to keep their shields up when dealing with journalists of any stripe. “Even when our most intelligent people are meeting with [the press] they are confronting the political enemy and that everything they say will, therefore, be used against us,” Nixon wrote. “I have to emphasize this over and over again because we never seem to get it across to our people no matter how many times they get burned.” Additionally, the president maintained that the staff should never comment on polls showing them ahead “in any of the major states without my specific approval.” With a growing fear over voter complacency, Nixon stressed that he didn’t wish to give the “impression . . . that we are conducting our campaign on the basis of polls rather than on the basis of principles.”³⁷⁵

Some observers of the media coverage that emerged in the campaign argue that journalists had either succumbed to or were overwhelmed by Republican tactics in the way they began to cover the 1972 elections. As media critic Joseph Spear has argued, the “Nixon campaign was a virtually flawless case study of media manipulation . . . Who perfected the techniques for taking the show on the road? Who demonstrated for them the importance of image, the necessity for a good public relations program, and PR experts to implement it? . . .

³⁷² See Nick Thimmesch’s Column in the *Baltimore Sun*, August 2, 1972, clipped and found in Buchanan Papers Box 8, NARA. See also Joseph Kraft’s column in *The Washington Post*, August 1, 1972, 19.

³⁷³ See Stuart Alsop’s column in *Newsweek*, July 17, 1972, 84.

³⁷⁴ Memorandum from Chuck Colson to Ken Clawson, August 1 and 2, 1972, Colson Papers, Box 79, NARA.

³⁷⁵ Memorandum from President Nixon to H.R. Haldeman, July 30, 1972, WHSF, Contested Files, Box 50, Nixon Library.

Who invented the office of communications?”³⁷⁶

Those in the media and the public expecting to see or hear much more of Richard Nixon during the upcoming Republican National Convention were going to be disappointed. Control would be the operative term both outside and inside the convention hall. As Haldeman’s pre-convention briefing note indicated, “Every delegation should have a ‘policeman.’ He should make sure that the delegation is behaving properly, that people aren’t making fools of themselves.” The chief of staff had a hand in many details of the convention in Miami, as memos concerning almost every small item crossed his desk for comment. Haldeman commented on how they should make the color of the president’s eyes lighter on photo layouts in the convention hall. The position of the flags, placards, and other signs were to be carefully placed. There were to be no black backgrounds behind the president. Even the balloons and the “blue part of the” ribbons for party delegates were too dark, according to the White House chief of staff, and never anywhere should anything “be done on pink paper.” But there were more serious political issues than blue eyes and pink streamers. Haldeman ordered that there should be no pictures of Chou and Nixon or Nixon and Mao that are smiling. As Haldeman had indicated, playing on the president’s image as tough but practical statesman following his groundbreaking trip to China, “You can use the picture of the President and Mao where Mao looks dull and the President serious.” The strategy papers overseen by the chief of staff on the tone of the convention were all business: “The tone of the Convention should be crisp, not emotional, confident without being smug or complacent, lively and factual without being grandiloquent and self-serving...; it mustn’t look slick or over staged. [The] Convention can’t appear to be a vacation for the delegates.”³⁷⁷

Much of the grist for this mill came from the boys at the White House who were watching the Democratic convention with both interest and disgust, from McGovern’s “slicked down” hair style to using a meatier gavel than the Democrats had used. As the pre-convention notes suggested, “To lend a sense of heritage, perhaps a different gavel should be used at each session and a fact sheet about each one given to the networks. The Democrats’ gavel sounded tinny. Ours should be solid.”³⁷⁸ Speeches by the Democrats suggested that the party’s leaders were ripe for a comedy roasting. As Dick Moore noted, “The speeches from the party were totally devoid of humor, and [Larry] O’Brien is something of an undertaker to begin with. We must plan some good cracks and laughs at the expense of the Democrats from the beginning.” Indeed, within a day, a planning memo suggested the Republican convention’s keynote speaker “should poke fun at McGovern with one-liners prepared by a comedy writer.” The thrust was that since McGovern would try to “play down his extreme position from now on, so we should be consistently keeping him on the defensive and trying to frustrate and irritate him.”³⁷⁹

Indeed, the team’s plan was to do everything different than the Democrats had done at their convention. Even Bill Safire was spending time thinking of songs for the event. Safire

³⁷⁶ See Spear, *The Presidents and the Press*, 31-32, 176, 178.

³⁷⁷ Please see the Convention briefing note, July 14, 1972, Chapin Papers, Box 23, NARA. See also Gordon Strachan to Peter Dailey, bcc to Dwight Chapin, June 30, 1972, Chapin Papers, Box 23, NARA.

³⁷⁸ See memorandum from Gordon Strachan to Peter Dailey, bcc to Dwight Chapin, June 30, 1972, Chapin Papers, Box 23, NARA. Included is a lengthy convention strategy paper. See also J. Bruce Whelihan to Dwight Chapin, July 11, 1972, Chapin Papers, Box 23, NARA, and Dwight Chapin to H.R. Haldeman, July 10, 1972, Chapin Papers, Box 23, NARA.

³⁷⁹ Memorandum from Dick Moore to Dwight Chapin, July 11, 1972, Chapin Papers, Box 23, NARA.

thought that using “God Bless America” might make a good contrast with McGovern’s apparent choice of “Bridge Over Troubled Waters.” As Safire indicated to Haldeman, using a Paul Simon song might not be the best idea for a Republican convention. “The writer ...is Paul Simon of Simon & Garfunkel, who also wrote ‘Mrs. Robinson’ and ‘Feelin’ Groovy,’ neither of which would be quite suitable for us.”³⁸⁰

The intent was that the Republican convention would avoid many of the gaffs they found in viewing their opponents’ event. There was much concern over the little things, from imputing “a little dignity” by having the delegates stand and cross their hearts during the Pledge of Allegiance, trying “to get *everyone* to sing,” and to try to look better than the Democrats at their convention. “Let’s see if we can’t find some friends at the Musician’s Union. The musicians at the Democratic National Convention all looked dog tired.” For the Republican convention, as Dick Moore reminded Chapin, image was everything. “Obviously delegates still don’t realize that if they read a newspaper or fall asleep they are likely to be put on camera.” The team believed that they needed to manage every minutia that the networks might pick up and the TV audience might notice. This included getting “a few minority accents among the delegates” to speak from the convention floor and “at least one foreign accent doing the pledge of allegiance.” There were concerns over the start of each night’s events and ensuring that all delegates arrived 15 minutes early, the need for “order,” and “podium traffic must be controlled!” Those on the podium were to wear only “neutral” clothing so as not to detract from the speakers, and there were to be neither empty seats nor “people reading, sleeping, drinking, or otherwise not paying attention to the business of the convention.” What they were going to do was avoid long speeches like those given by the Democrats and control the convention floor from the White House. As Moore indicated in his memo to Chapin, things needed to snap and click along. “In closing I would emphasize again that speeches are an archaic form of communication. Almost everything last night was too long, and therefore, dull. We plan short speeches and short everything, but it is plain that human nature will get in the way unless we monitor this item constantly and ruthlessly.”³⁸¹

The internal memorandums show that a great onus was placed on having an upbeat positive convention, where participants were in tune and in the moment, but not mean or mean-spirited. While it may be surprising why any of this was important to winning an election, it was all seen as part of the strategy to nail George McGovern. As Buchanan explained in a memorandum to the president, “A campaign which continually raises specters about McGovern’s extremism, and the craziness [sic] of his ideas, is the only kind of campaign I can think that can win us a major landslide.” However, the speechwriter cautioned, “we have to be wary of making George a martyr. Mean-spiritedness has no place in this campaign; thus, it is important that the campaign staff not be tired and bitchy as the campaign heats up.”³⁸²

To keep the “mean-spiritedness” in check, the political team wanted to limit the president’s appearances to a minimum prior to the convention, even suggesting that he not leave the White House at all until the final night. As internal memorandums suggested, “The President should stay in Washington and run the country until the evening of August 23rd. At that time, he should leave Washington, fly to Miami..., helicopter to the Convention Center, proceed to

³⁸⁰ Memorandum from Bill Safire to H.R. Haldeman, June 27, 1972, WHSF, Contested Files, Box 7, Nixon Library.

³⁸¹ Memorandum from Dick Moore to Dwight Chapin, July 11, 1972. See also memorandum from Bruce Whelihan to Dwight Chapin, July 11, 1972; Len Garment to Ray Price July 10, 1972, and Bill Carruthers and Mark Goode to Dwight Chapin, July 11, 1972, Chapin Papers, Box 23, NARA.

³⁸² Memorandum from Pat Buchanan to the President, July 23, 1972, WHSF, Contested Files, Box 1, Nixon Library.

holding room, and make his first appearance, for his acceptance speech, after the Vice President's speech." The idea was that it would "completely take the President out of the political arena. We continue to keep him in a position of President and from the Office of the Presidency he leaves his desk, flies to Miami, thanks the delegates and alternatives and the American people, makes his Acceptance speech, receives his ovations, moves to his helicopter en route Miami Airport and return to Washington."³⁸³

Indeed, this was indicative of the tightly managed public campaign, with Nixon purposely sequestered in the White House by a deliberate strategy cooked up by him and his staff. This view, of course, contrasts with the journalistic and historic image of a president isolated, out of touch, and alone in the Oval Office, descending into greater and greater darkness.³⁸⁴ But in fact, any images of Nixon as president beyond Pennsylvania Avenue were carefully contrived, right down to the utterances from the First Family.

To keep the image of Nixon as an elder statesman who could hold his own with communist leaders in China and the Soviet Union who would not stoop to the level of political warrior, the president needed not just the aide of his loyal staffers, but his wife and daughters. Nixon knew that he lacked some of the 'softer' qualities required to tug at the heartstrings in the heartland. He believed that his family might help bridge the gap. "As far as getting across the idea of warmth, interest in people, etc., our biggest assets here are PN, Tricia, and Julie," Nixon wrote in a memorandum to Haldeman. The president stressed the importance of using "people very close to RN" in "certain situations."³⁸⁵ It was clear that his staff also understood the difficulty that he had in projecting this "warmth" and "interest in people." After all, all they had to do was read the morning papers. As loathed columnist Jack Anderson wrote, "despite a quarter of a century of public life and a massive effort by his staff or public relations experts to humanize him, Richard Nixon's public image remains oddly shallow."³⁸⁶

Ray Price sent a memo to Haldeman indicating that the plan to use the First Family in the campaign was necessary to show the president's "*concern for people*." As the speechwriter pointed out, "This sense of caring is what we are weak on." Price thought that Pat Nixon would appeal to those in the heartland and stand in stark contrast to someone like Jackie Kennedy. "I suspect that a lot of people today, comparing the two, might suddenly come to realize how refreshing it is to have a working, gracious, involved, concerned and mature First Lady, rather than a frivolous pleasure-seeker from Camelot."³⁸⁷ The president wrote on the importance of this issue back in January, suggesting that he considered it a "top priority" to find a way to use his family.³⁸⁸ As the campaign heated up heading into summer, the president had Haldeman enlist Buchanan to help coach his daughters on how to steer around political questions. Nixon understood that even though "this is not generally Buchanan's approach," they would need help with "the more off-hand, subtle kind of answer."³⁸⁹

³⁸³ Memorandum from Ronald Walker to Dwight Chapin, July 18, 1972, Chapin Papers, Box 23, NARA.

³⁸⁴ See for example, Reeves, *President Nixon*; Woodward and Bernstein, *All the President's Men*, Small, *The Presidency of Richard Nixon*, 310; Parmet, *Richard Nixon and His America*, 610; Wicker, *One of Us*, 652, 653; Genovese, *The Nixon Legacy*, 241; and Drew, *Richard M. Nixon*, 45.

³⁸⁵ Memorandum from the President to H.R. Haldeman, July 24, 1972, WHSF, Contested Files, Box 35, Nixon Library.

³⁸⁶ *The Washington Post*, April 16, 1972, B7.

³⁸⁷ Memorandum from Ray Price to H.R. Haldeman, July 21, 1972, WHSF, Contested Files, Box 53, Nixon Library.

³⁸⁸ Presidential memorandum to H.R. Haldeman, January 28, 1972, WHSF, Contested Files, Box 50, Nixon Library.

³⁸⁹ Memorandum from the President to H.R. Haldeman, June 6, 1972, WHSF, Contested Files, Box 50, Nixon Library.

While Buchanan would handle the political questions, the president prepared to coach his own daughters on how to portray him as a warm family man for public consumption. He needed his daughters to indicate which memories for them would be “heartwarming.” Nixon crafted a memorandum indicating that “On the personal side, you might mention some of our Christmas parties where I played the piano for group singing, etc., always by ear.” Nixon told his daughters that they could say these recollections were “part of the Nixon story that is to you most heartwarming. And also point out that when you had your own birthday parties, etc., that I from time to time played a happy birthday song for you.” Another point the girls could make was to recall their father making phone calls just before dinner at the White House. “I call people who may be sick, who have had hard luck like losing an election or not getting a promotion in business that they expected, or sometimes the mother of someone who has been killed in action.”³⁹⁰ The president not only knew that such images would resonate in the heartland, but that he needed help in projecting his “warmth,” especially after a first term in office marked by war, violent protests, and presidential fist-waving.

The images that the president and his team did not want out in the nation heading in to the fall campaign were the scenes of violence and chaos that plagued the national conventions of both the Democratic and Republican Parties in 1968, or the increase in campus violence during 1970. Few, however, expected such disruptions in the election year of 1972. The Nixon administration showed little of the foreboding that they experienced heading to Miami four years earlier, where the mayhem had actually eclipsed the street violence if not the media coverage in Chicago.³⁹¹ Internal memorandums between John Dean and Haldeman in August reveal that although quite a bit of investigation went into the various groups and individuals that might show up in Miami at the party’s big show, the communications do not reveal deep concern with the prospect of large disruptions at their convention. Writing from presidential campaign headquarters in Miami Beach, Dean sensed that things were going to be different this time around, even though some demonstrators had arrived early. As the legal counsel noted, “Camped at Flamingo Park are approximately 2,000 protestors from all groups.” It was clear that from what he saw, that number was not expected to swell above 3,500. “This small number significantly limits the capability of the demonstrators to disrupt the Convention,” Dean wrote, describing a fragmented set of protestors with no single group in command. While there was no concern about large crowds, Dean believed that “the real potential for violence rests with approximately 400-500 hard core radicals. Showing “no fear of the police,” Dean believed there would be some “thrashing . . . from these militants, most of whom will probably be arrested before the Convention adjourns.” The target, Dean believed, would be Washington Avenue in front of the convention hall on the night of Wednesday, August 23, in order to “receive maximum media coverage. Their main goal is to be able to embarrass the Republicans during prime time by forcing the calling of the National Guard.”³⁹²

³⁹⁰ Memorandum from the President to Tricia and Julie, July 24, 1972, WHSF, Contested Files, Box 50, Nixon Library.

³⁹¹ See Frank Kusch, *Battleground Chicago: The Police and the 1968 Democratic National Convention* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2008), 58, 74. See also Norman Mailer, *Miami and the Siege of Chicago: An Informal History of the American Political Conventions of 1968* (Harmondsworth, England: Penguin Books, 1969).

³⁹² Administratively Confidential memorandums from John Dean to H.R. Haldeman, June 6, July 20, August 15 and August 21, 1972, Wilson Papers, Box 2, NARA.

At the party's convention, as heavy clouds of teargas tried to keep protestors from blocking the entry and exit of delegates, the president asked the youth and disaffected Democrats to join his "new majority," promising a "dynamite program for progress in America and peace in the world." As hundreds of anti-war protestors were hauled away by police, pelted all the way by demonstrators with rocks and bottles, Nixon pledged to delegates and the television audience that he would end the Cold War with the Chinese and the Soviets. While the president played diplomat, Vice President Agnew's speech gave the faithful the meat. Agnew asked delegates, "Do we turn our country over to the piecemeal, inconsistent policies of George McGovern, or do we entrust the future of this nation to the sound, tested leadership of Richard Nixon?" Agnew also spoke to the constituency they had wanted to attract since November of 1970: disaffected Democrats and other alienated voters. "To those millions who have been driven out of their home in the Democratic Party," the VP said, "I ask you to join us...as members of a new American majority bound together by our common ideals."³⁹³

Chief of Staff Haldeman had wanted a drastically different convention from the "mess" he and his staff saw from the Democrats, and "different" was exactly what they got. As the *Post*'s Marquis Childes suggested, "The Republican convention differs from the Democrats convention of a month ago as night from day, black from white. The difference lies in one word—control." As the journalist recalled, "The Democrats shambled along in what often seemed planned chaos, wasting their precious prime television with frivolities."³⁹⁴ The other major issue did not go unnoticed, and that was taking bread and butter votes away from the Democrats. As the *Wall Street Journal* noted as the convention began, it was obvious that there was "a carefully calculated wooing of blue-collar unionists, Jews, Catholics and other traditionally Democratic groups of voters who this year appear deeply disenchanted with the Democratic ticket. From platform praise of organized labor to presidential promises of parochial-school aid, the campaign pitch will invite converts from such usually non-Republican blocs." As John Ehrlichman told the paper, McGovern was not going to be able to reach those voters. "This is going to be a unique campaign in that the challenger has assumed an enormous burden of defending his own far-out proposals."³⁹⁵

From the convention floor columnist Joseph Alsop believed that the other real difference was that voters were going to make a choice based upon some good old fashioned practical matters. "This year, seemingly, the voters are going to choose their President the way any sensible man chooses a plumbing fixture. You do not expect to love, or even like a plumbing fixture. The test is not whether a plumbing fixture is charming. The main test of a plumbing fixture is whether it flushes." That result, the journalist said, had a lot to do with the type of candidate at the head of the Democratic ticket. As Alsop wrote, the voters who "appear to be defecting from the Democratic Party in droves—have taken a good, hard, skeptical look at George McGovern, his backers, and what they stand for. So far, they have heartily disliked what they have seen."³⁹⁶ A Gallup poll following the Republican National Convention revealed the mountain that McGovern had to climb to get back into the race against Richard Nixon. It showed the president leading his Democratic challenger 64 percent to 30 percent, which was virtually the same margin that Lyndon Johnson had over Republican Barry Goldwater in 1964.³⁹⁷ Not all the

³⁹³ See David Broder's coverage from the convention floor in the *Washington Post*, August 24, 1972, A1, A19.

³⁹⁴ The *Washington Post*, August 22, 1972, A19.

³⁹⁵ The *Wall Street Journal*, August, 21, 1972, 1, 3, 8.

³⁹⁶ Please see Joseph Alsop's column in the *Washington Post*, August 23, 1972, A27.

³⁹⁷ The *Washington Post*, August 30, 1972, A2.

press commentary was rosy, however. As he had often been, columnist Jack Anderson both agitated and worried Nixon's inner circle. Part of the reason was that he had a knack for placing his finger directly on a sensitive issue for the president. As Anderson wrote during the convention, "GOP strategists confide, indeed, that only one major obstacle lies in the way of a Nixon landslide in November. Not the economy. Not the war. It's Nixon's robot-like personality."³⁹⁸

That summer, Chief of Staff H. R. Haldeman had been worried about many issues, and the president's "unlikable" personality was just one of several. As he jotted down his concerns on a legal pad in his large comfortable office near the Oval Office in the White House one afternoon in late July, his attention turned to reports suggesting that Nixon's victory would hinge on a large voter turnout on Election Day. In a political strategy memo, Haldeman stressed that "a fundamental shift in our thinking" was needed. "Up until now we've been convinced that a small vote helps a conservative and a large vote helps the left wing." Polls indicated that decided Democratic voters planned to turn out for their candidate in November were more motivated to speak their minds and more galvanized to come out to show their support. Haldeman worried about a "small" turnout with Republican supporters too complacent to bother to vote. "This year for the first time since 1952, a big vote helps us, a small vote helps the opposition. McGovern has won all the primaries on a small vote." Back in July, the team knew it needed to have an aggressive get out the vote drive throughout the country, especially in battleground states in the Midwest, including "down-state Illinois, small town Ohio, and so forth." The massive voter drive was necessary, Haldeman suggested, as "McGovernites are sure to vote, ours aren't."³⁹⁹

With the strategy to have the president stay out of the public campaign, getting the faithful out to vote for him had become a unique challenge for the political team. Indeed, the campaign Nixon's men ran to retain the White House in 1972 bore little resemblance to what can be considered traditional American electioneering. Rather, reelection year from a view outside the White House appeared rather unorthodox in modern American electoral politics, where the invisibility of the incumbent president along the campaign trail, in retrospect, almost made Franklin Delano Roosevelt seem extroverted. In terms that bore great similarity to what he actually did during the election, Nixon indicated that in the first six critical weeks following his party's convention, he would not be campaigning but "in the White House doing my job." The president suggested that since the policy differences on the economy, on Vietnam, military spending, aid to parochial schools, and busing between he and McGovern were so vast, there was no need for him "to hammer them home." The hammer would need to come from party leaders that included Kansas Senator Bob Dole and former Texas Governor John Connally. The president's strategy was to build the "most efficient and effective campaign committee organization humanly possible." Nixon, like Haldeman, though, worried about low voter turnout, as he indicated that his greatest fear was the possibility that "complacency" might cost his team during the election. As a result, he reminded Haldeman that the team must "develop a sense of mission and not back into victory by default."⁴⁰⁰

³⁹⁸ The *Washington Post*, August 23, 1972, D17.

³⁹⁹ Haldeman memorandum of July 26, 1972, Haldeman Papers, Box 200, NARA.

⁴⁰⁰ In his memoirs, Nixon took pride in recalling how political biographer Theodore H. White professed admiration for the political machine the incumbent put together for the '72 election. Although White's referral to CREEP as "one of the most spectacularly efficient exercises in political technology of the postwar era" was not exactly a ringing endorsement. See Nixon, *RN*, 665, 669.

Nixon's loyal chief of staff also worried about his party's electoral complacency, a disengagement of their base from the process, and that McGovern might find a way to capture the voters that Chuck Colson wanted to form into a new coalition. Staff memorandums echoed Haldeman's internal concerns. "McGovern will have a firmly left-wing Northern Democrat Vice-President and he will spend an unprecedented amount of time campaigning in the Northeast and Mid-west and Far-west," Doug Hallett wrote. "By doing so, it is possible that he could lose the popular vote and still win the electoral vote count. And since it is possible—and since it's the *only possible* way he could win—we should worry about countering McGovern's potential."⁴⁰¹

Haldeman noted that to win they needed to appeal to the anti-McGovern vote and others out in Middle America who would respond to stories and speeches that painted McGovern as someone separate from the middle of the voting spectrum. "We have to fire up the Democrats for Nixon," Haldeman warned. "We have to activate the silent majority versus the activist minority." Knowing that they had launched a dangerous gamble with their strategy with Nixon out of the visible campaign, Haldeman knew what had to be done. "The theory of the President above the battle thus becomes very dangerous, unless our people are stirred up."⁴⁰²

His boss inside the Oval Office also understood this very well. As Nixon later wrote, "Politics is battle, and the best way to fire up your troops is to rally them against a visible opponent on the other side of the field. If a loyal supporter will fight hard for you, he will fight twice as hard against your enemies."⁴⁰³ There was a problem, however. Haldeman knew, much to his own peril, the one man who was more than willing to stir up the loyalists inside and outside the White House, and that was none other than the president's special counsel, Charles Colson.

While the strategy for the president to remain above the fray and let staff and surrogates do the heavy lifting originated with Richard Nixon's experiences in the 1970 mid-term elections, much of the campaign's bite came from Charles Colson. The former Marine and corporate lawyer plotted, prodded, cajoled, bullied, and threatened staffers and members of the media as a means to a single end: victory on Election Day. There could have been no doubt about the position of power and influence that Colson had gained in the White House; that he had the ear of the president was not a well-kept secret. As summer turned to fall, the president met with Colson almost every day and called for his political operative through the White House operator more than any other member of staff, rivaling even Bob Haldeman, the White House chief of staff.⁴⁰⁴ The political strategist and special counsel to the president ran his own show, often delivering memos to personnel without going through Haldeman, his superior. Near the end of August, Colson fired off one such declaration to the staff, leaving no doubt about the power he believed he had in the corridors of the White House.

There are 71 days left between now and the election. Every single one of these is a campaign day and for those of you who have not been reminded of this lately, every day has 24 hours . . . There should be no necessity for this kind of memo and in the case of most of you there is not. Just so there is no misunderstanding, however, I want to make it perfectly clear what the policy will be for the next 71 days.

⁴⁰¹ Doug Hallett to H.R. Haldeman, June 15, 1972, WHSF, Contested Files, Box 7, Nixon Library.

⁴⁰² Haldeman memorandum of July 26, 1972, Haldeman Papers, Box 200, NARA.

⁴⁰³ Richard Nixon, *In the Arena* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1990), 245.

⁴⁰⁴ Please see the White House Telephone Tape Subject Log, January to November 1972, prepared by the Nixon Presidential Materials Staff, Nixon Library.

No one should plan any trips anywhere without my express approval. No one should ever be out of the reach of the telephone. The White House Switchboard must know at all times where everyone is; each individual member of staff should insure that he or she can be reached at any time of the day or night . . . No speaking engagements should be accepted, no trips should be planned without my knowing and approving in advance.⁴⁰⁵

Colson appeared unconcerned with crossing lines in the pursuit of the ultimate goal. He warned staffers that he expected “maximum output from every member of the staff for whom I have any responsibility. I will be very intolerant of less than maximum output.” Nixon’s personal aide cared little for stepping on toes or ruffling feathers. As Colson boldly claimed, “I am totally unconcerned with anything other than getting the job done. If I bruise feelings or injure anyone’s morale, I will be happy to make amends on the morning of November 8 assuming we have done our job and the results are evident.”⁴⁰⁶

To make winning “evident” in the fall reelection bid, the campaign assumed two almost separate tracks after August. One was a full-fledged assault on the Democratic Party and its nominee, and the other was almost a “non-campaign” with the president keeping such a distance from public electioneering that some members of the media openly wondered if the president was still breathing.⁴⁰⁷ The conduit between the political attack squads and Nixon’s statesman-like posture of “indifference” to the nastiness of political wars was Colson.

The political operative waged war against not only Democrats but also against those within his own campaign deemed not to be on board with him all the way. This included muscling in on the political operations of CREEP, the organization which later became infamous for its involvement with a litany of dirty tricks on political rivals across the country during the 1972 campaign. However, the real election headquarters were not located at 1701 Pennsylvania Avenue, but a block away in the White House, and Colson never let anyone forget it. The blood between the two operations was bad as CREEP staffers increasingly found themselves forced to produce amid a climate of fear and immense pressure from Colson and aide Dick Howard. As Magruder recalls, the daily word was, “What the hell are you guys *doing* over there? What are we *getting* for all that money?”⁴⁰⁸ The stridency with which Colson operated was not merely due to his impervious and authoritarian nature but because everyone in the bubble knew that he had the president’s ear. As columnists Roland Evans and Bob Novak noted, “Colson has grown so close to the President so quickly because he exudes qualities Mr. Nixon admires: toughness, quickness, intelligence—and a lust for personal combat.” Moreover, as a Nixon campaign aide added, “Chuck says the things the President likes to hear.”⁴⁰⁹ Colson also liked what the president had to say, including some of his comments when blowing off steam in the Oval Office that others in the White House might have chosen to ignore.⁴¹⁰

To Colson, the president’s words were marching orders, and he had no difficulty letting the staff know that they would fall in line or face the consequences. As Haldeman recalled, “By the spring of 1972 Colson had angered nearly everyone inside the White House—and out.” The chief of staff knew that even Mitchell and Ehrlichman felt they had come under his thumb,

⁴⁰⁵ Memorandum from Charles Colson to the Staff, August 28, 1972, Colson Papers, Box 132, NARA.

⁴⁰⁶ Memorandum from Charles Colson to the Staff, August 28, 1972, Colson Papers, Box 132, NARA.

⁴⁰⁷ See Spear, *The Presidents and the Press*, 31-32, 176, 178.

⁴⁰⁸ Magruder, *An American Life*, 194. Original emphasis.

⁴⁰⁹ See the Roland Evans and Robert Novak column in the *Washington Post*, September 6, 1972 (drawn from Buchanan Papers, Box 8, NARA). See also the *Washington Post*, December 5, 1972, B1, B3.

⁴¹⁰ Drew, *Richard M. Nixon*, 26, and Small, *The Presidency of Richard Nixon*, 220.

becoming “powerful enemies.” As Haldeman recounted in his memoir, “their anger at Colson had always landed on my shoulders. I was the one who had to carry their complaints to Colson.” Haldeman, though, did not have time to deal with bruised feelings and tolerated Colson even though he knew that the actions of the special counsel hurt morale. “Dealing with Colson was no fun for White House staffers at any level. If he was superior in rank, he would bully them. If he was inferior, he would smile—remind them he had ‘the ear of the President.’ Which he had.”⁴¹¹

Clearing the path for Colson’s open-door policy in the Oval Office and in the reelection effort was aided by the resignation of John Mitchell as campaign manager. While Mitchell had tried to curb Colson’s worst instincts, new manager Clark MacGregor proved to be no match for the Massachusetts attorney. Mitchell had tried to keep Colson from taking over everything. As deputy campaign manager Jeb Magruder recalled, “Mitchell hated Colson. He often said that Colson had only joined the Administration because he wanted to build up his law practice.”⁴¹² Nixon’s chief domestic policy adviser, John Ehrlichman, thought that Colson’s game could be boiled down to a thirst for power. For Colson, that was to do whatever was necessary to secure the president’s approval. As a result, according to Ehrlichman, Colson “was to be the man who would do whatever Richard Nixon wanted done.”⁴¹³

With his growing power in the corridors of the White House, Colson’s staff had swelled to twenty-three. The special counsel to the president attempted to dominate not only the operations at CREEP but to stack the numbers in his favor in the morning attack-group planning meetings. There, Colson helped hatch plans and develop attack speeches that he said were approved inside the Oval Office. The special counsel knew how to play the game. When some Republican leaders complained about “obnoxious” overkill, such as the relentless attacks over McGovern’s plan to name Ramsey Clark as FBI director (sometimes even the president complained), Colson blamed the origin of the attack plan on the operation at 1701.⁴¹⁴ Although Haldeman is often depicted as the sturdy chief of staff who guarded all access to the president, he not only did not control Colson’s access but was in a competition for the president’s time by 1972.⁴¹⁵ Through Colson, the president was able to have his hand (if he always knew the extent of it or not) in the middle of a litany of political malfeasance.⁴¹⁶ Those in the media covering the White House understood that a star had risen and Haldeman’s Berlin Wall appeared breached. As columnists Evans and Novak observed in early September, “Colson is now the dominant tone-setter of that campaign. The only possible check against him is the all-powerful Haldeman, who now seems to totally approve of Colson.”⁴¹⁷ While the chief of staff certainly agreed with his positions and gave assent tacitly or otherwise, it is apparent that he was also wary of Colson’s influence on the president. As Bill Safire noted, “Haldeman’s only real rival—for Nixon’s time, and in the decision-making process—was Charles Colson.” Indeed, Haldeman wanted to know whenever Colson and the president had something cooking, and when the special counsel left his

⁴¹¹ Haldeman, *The Ends of Power*, 153.

⁴¹² Magruder, *An American Life*, 143.

⁴¹³ Ehrlichman, *Witness to Power*, 60.

⁴¹⁴ For a discussion of this point, see the Evans and Novak column in the *Washington Post*, September 6, 1972. See also the *Washington Post*, December 5, 1972, B1, B3.

⁴¹⁵ For views on Haldeman’s “Berlin Wall,” see Lukas, *Nightmare*, 225, 461; Perlstein, *Nixonland*, 362-363, 422; Drew, *Richard M. Nixon*, 32-33, and Dallek, *Nixon and Kissinger*, 82, 98-99.

⁴¹⁶ See WHT Conversation No. 830-6 and 831-6, January 2 and 3, 1973, NARA.

⁴¹⁷ See Evans and Novak column in the *Washington Post*, September 6, 1972.

office in the Old Executive Building, charging off to do the president's bidding, Haldeman took notice, "determined not to let Colson end-run him with the Old Man."⁴¹⁸

As a man who rubbed many staffers the wrong way, the change in the White House dynamic did not sit well with everyone. When Staff Secretary Bruce Kehrli sent out a request to the president's can-do man to follow up on a Nick Thimmesch article slamming McGovern, Colson's failure to respond in a timely fashion, and the "quality" of the response sent the secretary through the roof. Dick Howard was the unfortunate emissary of the substance of Colson's work, the origin of which was a Presidential Action Memorandum, and thus bore the brunt of Kehrli's blunt response.

The attached is a marvelous example of what we should never ever do for the rest of the campaign. We have received a Presidential action request. We have, of course, taken seven days to figure out a reason why not to comply with it. That in and of itself is unforgivable from here on out. Nothing that can be done in a day should take more than a day. There is no reason that this answer could not have been prepared a week ago. Moreover it is high time that we stopped figuring out reason[s] why we can't do things and decide ways in which we can do them. If I were the President I would fire Colson for sending this reply in . . . Let's get whoever wrote this and reorient his thinking entirely—think positive about how we can get the job done and not all of the reasons why we can't and let's think positively in hours not days.⁴¹⁹

According to Jeb Magruder, speechwriter Pat Buchanan, who had been with the president since the '68 campaign, "felt some resentment" against some of those who came in after him and had gained more of the president's ear. Buchanan, a chief political strategist in 1972, was also a loner. He not only preferred to avoid staff meetings to work on speeches and supervise the daily news summaries for the president, but was wary of Colson's actions, referring to him as a "Massachusetts Liberal."⁴²⁰ The speed with which Colson's star had risen was alarming to those who had been around the president for much of his career in Washington. As Magruder recalled, "Colson became the only newcomer to gain the direct access to Nixon that Haldeman, Ehrlichman, Kissinger, Mitchell, Shultz and Connally among others enjoyed." While Colson's value as a political force of nature was in some ways indispensable to the team's efforts to retain the White House, the notable fault lines in his character had spread under everyone's feet. "I came to regard Colson as an evil genius," Magruder wrote in his memoir. "His brilliance was undeniable, but it was too often applied to encouraging Nixon's darker side, his desire to lash out at his enemies, his instinct for the jugular. I would have to say that—granting always Nixon's central responsibility for what happened in his administration—Colson was one of the men among his advisers most responsible for creating the climate that made Watergate possible, perhaps inevitable."⁴²¹

It was from this "climate" that the war for reelection inside the White House was waged. From the president who put people in position, from fiery take-no-prisoners strategists like Buchanan, misguided idealists like Magruder, to trend setters with a bullwhip like Colson, the

⁴¹⁸ See Safire, *Before the Fall*, 282. Colson also chaired the Planning Group meeting that took place every Monday, Wednesday, and Friday at 2:30 pm in the Roosevelt Room, preparing for the president's public activities and ensuring that everyone in the administration was on message.

⁴¹⁹ See the typed and handwritten notes from Bruce Kehrli to Dick Howard, August 3, 1972. See also the Action Memorandum from Bruce Kehrli to Chuck Colson, July 19, 1972, and the Administratively Confidential Memorandum from Dick Howard to Bruce Kehrli, August 3, 1972, all found in the W. Richard Howard Papers, Box 4, NARA.

⁴²⁰ Magruder, *An American Life*, 82.

⁴²¹ Magruder, *An American Life*, 75.

team went into the meat of the '72 reelection with a self-righteous stridency chased by a nasty bitter undercurrent. The singular goal was winning. The pressure was on the entire staff to push Democrat George McGovern into a corner from which there was no escape. In the execution of these tasks, Colson was relentless for results and he wanted them both perfect and "yesterday." Those within his earshot, even if they answered more directly to Haldeman, received an earful concerning the nature of their duties. "I am now convinced that we are not doing an adequate job of forcing Congressmen and Senators and/or challengers running against incumbents, to force their opponents to either support or disavow McGovern," Colson insisted in a memo to Dick Howard. The special counsel wanted more than action, but measurable results. "Until somebody can show me a complete breakdown, updated with names, I am not going to be satisfied that this job is well handled." Colson was not at all concerned with browbeating to get his point across. As he made plain to Howard, he was not about to "accept Jeb Magruder's glib assurances" that the job was going to get done to his satisfaction. Nixon's political man ordered Howard to get himself, Magruder, Joanne Gordon, Caukins, and Berentson into a meeting where he could lay down the law. "Let's find out what in Christ has been done and who is going to do what from here on out."⁴²²

Part of running a tight ship was managing the message and killing embarrassing stories before they appeared. Plugging leaks was a constant preoccupation and Colson, for one, wanted those he believed responsible for leaks put down fast. The special counsel was not the only one who believed the problems originated in the campaign's official headquarters at 1701 Pennsylvania Avenue. In late August, both he and Haldeman were on the warpath to silence staffers talking to the press, especially when columnists Evans and Novak ended up with too much information about what went on in their early morning attack meetings. "All signs very much point to 1701 on this one," Colson suggested to Haldeman. "Evans and Novak have a piece coming out on Sunday which details the whole 9:15 attack meeting and attack strategy here. Novak told me today that Evans had gotten the story, although Evans never called me. Novak implied that they had gotten their information from 1701." Colson was soon on the phone to everyone in the regular morning meeting to find out who spoke to the columnists. As he wrote in a memo to Dick Howard, "what all of this adds up to in my mind is that we have a serious leak somewhere and we damn well better find out or roll a few heads . . ."⁴²³

Effective attacks meant an effective military-style run campaign organization, a relentless, regimented, and highly planned organizational structure that was a way of life for the former Marine, Chuck Colson. And if they liked it or not, it became a way of life for White House staff charged with attacking George McGovern. The typical day began early for those on the political strategy team as they pushed the attack on their Democratic rival. The main vehicle for this assault on George McGovern was a war of words through the use and manipulation of the media. To carry their message to the people by way of their surrogates and the press, the Nixon administration established a counterattack group to strike out at the Democrats through the media and their surrogates in the field. The daily activities often began before 6:00 am with staffers undertaking a thorough scan of the morning papers, scissors in hand, including pulling stories hot off the morning wire services. The operation's foundation was a series of high-level meetings coupled with the dissemination and implementation of material brought forth from Mort Alin and Pat Buchanan's media operations. Each morning at 8:00 am, there was a brief "great thoughts" for the day meeting with Haldeman and Colson, followed by a strategy meeting

⁴²² Memorandum from Chuck Colson to Dick Howard, August 28, 1972, Colson Papers, Box 132, NARA.

⁴²³ Memorandum from Charles Colson to H.R. Haldeman, August 25, 1972, Colson Papers, Box 132, NARA.

at 8:15 am in Ehrlichman's office with Colson, Haldeman, and Clark MacGregor. Colson then related the guts of that high-level scrum to his aide Dick Howard, who briefed the counterattack group consisting of chair Ed Faylor, some of Colson's men, including Dick Howard, and a writer (usually from the Buchanan operation) for their daily 15 minute meeting at 9:15 sharp, while Haldeman later briefed the president during their regular morning meeting. On the heels of these White House meetings, writers put together the material for the surrogates in the field, while the RNC distributed all releases by congressmen and senators to all media outlets.⁴²⁴ Colson expected the attack material on the Democratic opposition from the speechwriters and strategists to be pushed directly onto the streets and appear in newspapers and on television by those directly in the counterattack operations. "I would like each of them (Faylor, Clawson, Buchanan, Koch, and Scali) to try to take the quotes and points out of here and get them into the hands of the press people who can push McGovern on these points."⁴²⁵

The "press people" felt the daily pressure from above build as they headed into the dog days of summer. The chief political writers and strategists pushed their staff, who in turn pressured John Ziegler and his communication staffers, while Colson breathed down everyone's neck for more. Nixon's special counsel wanted information on the hour, and nothing less. His zealousness to go after the stories emanating in the press ruffled the feathers of the administration's press secretary more than once. Colson was not pleased with the speed that he learned of information emanating out of White House briefing room, and wanted to install a phone line from the briefing room to Ken Clawson's office for immediate reports. When Ziegler complained, Colson fired back. "I think the attached [memo] is getting ridiculous. We are in no way trying to do anything with this request for a line but be able to be aware of events as they build up and get hot." Colson complained that it was unacceptable for his men to wait "until four or five hours," as given the pace of the attack team, the special counsel insisted that it was too late as "we may have already stuck our foot in our mouths." Colson was adamant that they did not have the resources to send someone over to monitor each press briefing and needed timely information. Nixon's can-do man was adamant: "Personally I don't quite understand your hangup with this request."⁴²⁶

Colson claimed that the president had made it perfectly clear to him early on that he was to do anything that was necessary to protect his interests. "I don't give a damn how it is done," Colson recalled the president's angry words. "I don't want to be told why it can't be done...I don't want excuses. I want results. I want it done, whatever the cost." And while the president's outburst concerned plugging leaks, it appears that Colson used this to justify *all* acts on "behalf" of the president.⁴²⁷ Special consultant to Richard Nixon, Leonard Garment, understood the dangerous dynamic created for the president with someone like Colson in his inner circle. Garment believed that there were those around Nixon "who brought out in him and each other what I can only call a negative synergism—a set of negative qualities which, instead of canceling each other out, multiplied each other."⁴²⁸ Indeed, as Theodore White noted, "the President's men saw no distinction between ends and means, and they were making war not just in Vietnam but all across the home front, too. All the disputes over home issues, as well as foreign issues, were

⁴²⁴ Memorandum from E.D. Faylor to Jeb Magruder, July 28, 1972, Contested Files, WHSF, Box 35, Nixon Library.

⁴²⁵ Memorandum from Charles Colson to Dick Howard, July 27, 1972, Colson Papers, Box 132, NARA.

⁴²⁶ Memorandum from Charles Colson to Ronald Ziegler, July 26, 1972, Colson Papers, Box 132, NARA.

⁴²⁷ Lukas, *Nightmare*, 71. Colson's paraphrasing of Nixon is a bit different in his own memoir than what is reported by Lukas, but the meaning was essentially the same. See Colson, *Born Again*, 62.

⁴²⁸ White, *Breach of Faith*, 211.

sucked into the vortex of ideological war; as in war, victory became the only goal and the means savage.” What helps explain this need was the undercurrent of culture wars, led by a new subculture that was undermining traditional values and threatened to destroy the nation, as they knew it.⁴²⁹ However, as Bill Safire pointed out, while there was not a classic “groupthink” mentality in the White House about issues concerning foreign and domestic policy, “where the inner circle’s groupthink and paranoid style did reinforce each other disastrously was on attitudes, but nobody thought to guard against that.”⁴³⁰ At the beginning of August, Bob Woodward and Carl Bernstein wrote in the *Washington Post* that \$25,000 from the president’s campaign ended up in bank account of one of the five Watergate burglars. On August 30, President Nixon told the nation that White House counsel John Dean’s investigation into the Watergate burglaries revealed that no one from the administration or the White House was involved in that “bizarre incident.”⁴³¹

For the remainder of that peculiar campaign year, what the team did best was to manage (at least most of the time) to aim their guns outside their own tent, and focus its energies on the Democratic challenger, and that included the ubiquitous Charles Colson. As usual, it was Pat Buchanan who tried as best he could to remind everyone that the senator from South Dakota was the quarry. “Again, the critical point is that just as McGovern ought to make ‘Nixon’ the issue—so the issue this fall is McGovern.” In a memo to Haldeman, Colson, and Ehrlichman, the speechwriter and strategist pointed out that the “bottom line” was simple: “Will he and the hard-core left-winger radicals who took over the party take over America . . . If the country goes to the polls in November, scared to death of McGovern, thinking him vaguely anti-American and radical and pro the left-wingers and militants, then they will vote against him—which means *for* us.” Going negative against an opponent was about to take on a whole new meaning. As Buchanan stressed, “What we have done thus far, and fairly well, is not put the President thirty-four points ahead—but McGovern thirty-four points behind.”⁴³² As Nixon’s loyal fighters in the White House understood, the key to victory for the remaining weeks before Americans went to the polls was to stay on McGovern’s back and keep the president of the United States out of his own campaign.

⁴²⁹ White, *Breach of Faith*, 420-421. As White points out, they clashed on not just the war, but on all points.

⁴³⁰ Safire, *Before the Fall*, 277.

⁴³¹ The *Washington Post*, August 30, 1972, A1.

⁴³² Memorandum from Pat Buchanan to H.R. Haldeman, Charles Colson, and John Ehrlichman, September 13, 1972, Buchanan Papers, Box 5, NARA.

CHAPTER 6

THE “FRONT-PORCH” CAMPAIGN

In my view, intense campaigning will rejuvenate the McGovern camp, will bring us head to head with them on the networks every night, will energize partisan Democratic loyalties, will remind millions of people of the Candidate Nixon and will turn a landslide into a horserace.⁴³³

Rose Mary Woods sat at her desk in the West Wing of the White House in the third week of September 1972 with a growing unease. The discreet and dedicated Woods had been with the politician from California longer than anyone in the administration. Since 1951, she had ridden the buses, endured the long car rides from one end of California to the other, and gazed out the window at America during the lengthy train trips across the country. Woods dealt with smoky rooms, cramped campaign offices, and the predictable collection of hotels and motels through the boom and bust of Richard Nixon's long political career. For her years of “savage support” Woods had expected her just reward, a valued seat at his side as the most loyal and closest political confidant when he claimed the ultimate political prize back in 1968. Indeed, Woods was the new president's first staff appointment, but as personal secretary. It was Nixon's second appointment of Bob Haldeman as White House chief of staff in 1969 that changed things for the long-time Nixon loyalist. There was little question as to who was in charge of those around the president as the new administration settled into 1600 Pennsylvania Avenue in early 1969. With Haldeman's growing influence, people no longer went through Woods to see the president as they were then filtered through Nixon's new number one. By 1972, Woods found herself moved away from her cherished seat just outside the doors of the Oval Office, and down the West Wing Hall. In the Nixon White House, where proximity often translated to influence, Woods may as well have been back in her hometown of Sebring, Ohio, for the level of insight she was afforded into the reelection effort in 1972. One day frustration welling, the secretary informed the Secret Service agent blocking her way into the Oval Office that he would need to use his sidearm to keep her from the president. In the shadow of the seat of power, Woods, who Nixon once described as “virtually a part of the family”; as “Aunt Rose” to his daughters, Tricia and Julie, or “the fifth Nixon,” was not only out of the inner circle but out of the loop as she stared with incredulity at the mounting pile of correspondence from across the nation. Woods did not like what she read.⁴³⁴

Had Nixon's faithful personal secretary been made aware of the political strategy hatched inside the Oval Office, she may have known what to make of the early complaints and concerns from the volunteers, organizers, and party members out in the field. They were all waiting anxiously for the campaign to start and wondered what the “hold up” was in the White House.

⁴³³ Memorandum from Charles Colson to H.R. Haldeman, October 18, 1972, WHSF, Contested Files, Box 40, Nixon Library.

⁴³⁴ Regarding Woods' concern for the correspondence, please see memorandum from Rose Mary Woods to H.R. Haldeman, September 18, 1972, WHSF, Contested Files, Box 14, Nixon Library. For Nixon's thoughts on his secretary, see Nixon, *RN*, 294, 337. For contention between Woods and Haldeman, see the *Washington Post*, January 24, 2005, B04. Long-time Nixon loyalists Robert Finch and Herb Klein had believed that the president-elect would appoint Woods not Haldeman as White House chief of staff. For this and the regard held for Woods by Nixon's daughters and others in the White House, see the *New York Times* December 25, 2005, E32, and January 24, 2005, B7. See also the *Washington Post*, January 24, 2005, B04. Woods actually indicated that her connection with Nixon dated to 1947, as she worked on a House foreign affairs committee when Nixon was a freshman in the House of Representatives, and took notice of her skills. See also Lukas, *Nightmare*, 460-462.

Woods' office was flooded with unsolicited advice and questions that she was at a loss to explain. "I am enclosing just three of many notes, calls, etc. I have been getting about the local campaign activity in various states," Woods wrote in a memo to Haldeman. "It seems it is impossible for people to get bumper stickers, pins, buttons, or any campaign literature." Woods indicated to Haldeman that it was one thing that campaign paraphernalia was not getting out to the grassroots, but that there was a palpable fear that the sluggish or almost nonexistent campaign was going to cost them the reelection. "Some of our friends in California are really becoming disturbed that we seem to be standing still." One of the examples from Woods revealed a fear that the administration would lose important ground unless the White House came out swinging. "Dear Mr. President: We've been wondering when the Campaign will begin! McGovern is working, seemingly, day and night and crawling into every college, factory, club and neighborhood to peddle his trash—and seemingly his audiences are beginning to *grow*. Some of those seeds are taking root!" Letter writers worried that the public was less in love with the president than "scared of McGovern." The prospect that the president was losing his profile worried those writing to Nixon in the White House. "Now, then we mustn't let McGovern get the advantage by sitting on our hands!" one disturbed supporter from Chicago wrote. "Seemingly the Campaign (Republican) Committee has not awakened as yet! It's said the Campaign will start after Labor Day. What's holding it up?"⁴³⁵

The "hold up" can be tracked back through much of the spring and summer as Nixon's inner circle grappled with its new political footing for rolling out the effort to reclaim the presidency. Launching a campaign that was not supposed to *look* like a campaign had some staff unsure of how to proceed. In August, memos from junior staff on this issue were cut down sharply. Staffer Bob Teeter discovered this when he suggested that New York City would be "an ideal place to kick off the campaign." Chief of staff H.R. Haldeman circled the section in a flourish, replying in a bold black scrawl: "*We are not going to kick off the campaign.*"⁴³⁶ Indeed the operation initially struggled with the challenges of this non-traditional plan, between wanting to hold the reins of their attack dogs from going after their opponent too hard and too soon and actually allowing the campaign machinery in the field to bring Nixon's message to the voters. The delicate balancing act was keeping the president's "record before the American public without over-exposing the candidate."⁴³⁷

Contributing to the slow start was a combination of internal bickering, disorganization, and a fear that aggressive overt measures might play into the hands of their enemies. The attitudes and personal relationships were often poisonous, tense associations were exacerbated by the logistical challenges surrounding the numerous attack operations, including the hiring of seven new political coordinators to handle specific regional headquarters, and to restructure training budgets and internal organization.⁴³⁸ In early August, aide Larry Higby was upset over the lack of coordination and leadership concerning election activities, especially the attack-counterattack operations. Higby laid out his concerns to Haldeman in a lengthy memorandum that revealed a deep level of frustration. The main issue for the aide was that there was no central

⁴³⁵ Memorandum from Rose Mary Woods to H.R. Haldeman, September 18, 1972, WHSF, Contested Files, Box 14, Nixon Library. See also Memorandum from Gordon Strachan to Fred Malek, September 19, 1972, Box 14, Nixon Library.

⁴³⁶ See memorandum of August 3, 1972, Chapin Papers, Box 23, NARA.

⁴³⁷ "Critique of the 1972 Campaign" memorandum from Pat Buchanan to the President, WHSF, Box 33, Nixon Library.

⁴³⁸ Memorandum from Fred Malek to Clark MacGregor, July 28, 1972, WHSF, Contested Files, Box 35, Nixon Library.

point for coordination or guidance for the operations. The issue that most concerned Higby was that Colson had busied himself with so many other projects (including Democrats for Nixon) that he was not keeping his eye on what mattered. The reality, Higby wrote, was that Colson had abandoned his responsibilities to underlings. Even though the special counsel was supposedly one of the “great thinkers” and “grand strategists,” there was not near enough actual implementation. Higby believed that the White House attack operations should be run by Colson. “Essentially, like with any other operation, there needs to be someone in charge,” Higby stressed to the White House chief of staff. “Ehrlichman is apparently pushing you for this position, but I would recommend that Colson is the person to use here and the person who should have been doing this all along. We need Colson’s *total* involvement in implementation.” This included overseeing the surrogate scheduling and meeting with the attack group each morning to make sure the proper line of attack went out. “Someone needs to make it clear to Colson that this is *his* job—not Dick Howard’s, and that he had better start doing it.”

In fact, Higby was challenging the White House chief of staff to channel Colson’s awesome energy and amassed power in the “right” direction. Higby recommended that Haldeman continue the “great thoughts” 8:00 am meetings with Colson, but that they needed to reassess the terrain. Higby argued that Colson had been given all of the power but was failing to use it correctly, as he left it to subordinates while he went off doing other things. “You may argue that in effect you are investing Colson with the power to set our line. This isn’t really true. In fact, the contrary is true. You’ve currently abdicated to him the power to totally set our line by default.” Colson, argued Higby, needed some direction on how to use this power to move the operation forward, believing that Haldeman was the only one with the authority to get Colson on track. The aide was blunt. “You need to make it clear to [Colson] that *he* is in charge of the counterattack...” The internal politics on this was complicated, however, and Higby’s attempt to steer Colson away from his project with John Connally and the Democrats for Nixon, would not be easy. Everyone knew that the reason that Colson was involved with a litany of projects was that the president of the United States wanted it that way. “As you indicated, the most difficult part of this may be explaining it to the President,” Higby wrote. “He’s the one that gets Colson started—and once he is started there is no turning him off.”⁴³⁹

The efforts to control the unwieldy power placed in Colson’s hands by Haldeman and the president were obviously a difficult challenge. And the lines of communication over this issue were seldom clear as were the contradictions inherent when dealing with a potent weapon like Colson. As on July 20, 1972, just a few weeks prior to Higby’s memorandum, Doug Hallet had written to Haldeman (as per Higby’s request of July 19) asking for Colson to do the impossible by taking over most of the CREEP operations at 1701 Pennsylvania Avenue while still running his own White House operations. “Combining the Colson interest-group operation with 1701’s—1701 would get lead responsibility—and it would also get Colson....Colson could take as many people from here as he needs, reorganize the operation, fire and hire people, etc. Malek would retain his administrative role, but Colson would have the lead in idea development and kicking ass. That is not all Colson would have. He’d be Macgregor’s deputy with authority to run all over the place.” Based on Higby’s urging, Hallet suggested that the Democrats for Nixon operation report to Colson. It was important for a heavy-weight like the president’s special counsel to be in charge of this important operation. “I fear we are spending at lot of time talking

⁴³⁹ Memorandum from Larry Higby to H.R. Haldeman, August 8, 1972, WHSF, Contested Files, Box 35, Nixon Library.

to, stroking, dining, and salivating over groups we know are going to support us anyway while ignoring the opportunity to expand our constituency.”⁴⁴⁰

Colson was indeed off in numerous directions and his power led to sometimes chaotic organizational structures. There were, however, many layers of fur on this political animal that helped explain some of the concerns over Colson’s influence. As far back as June, Gordon Strachan and Fred Malek were worried about the lack of leadership at the 1701 office because of the need for consistent and managerial authority. As Strachan explained, “The real problem, which Malek discusses at length in the Overall Direction and Priorities sections, is for a tough, hard-driving, ass-kicking manager. Colson is filling this void in some way on particular projects, but this is a structurally unsound arrangement.” Strachan suggested that Malek wanted the job. The chief of staff was unimpressed, scratching on the document, “*how do you know?*” and then circling Strachan’s first paragraph, writing, “*Useless.*”⁴⁴¹

Attacks on CREEP and the takeover of its operations from any leadership in the campaign were taking their toll before the end of the summer. When copies of one of McGovern’s speeches did not come down the pike quick enough, Gordon Strachan was preparing for another body blow from the heavy hitters in the White House. The “effectives of the 1701 organization” in the eyes of some was always under attack. As Strachan complained to Magruder, “Jeb, I’m not writing this to bitch and moan, but this is just the type of incident that sets up an Ehrlichman and Colson attack on 1701 to their increasing success.”⁴⁴² The White House was seldom happy with CREEP’s handling of most of the field operations, including the storefronts organized or run by 1701. There were numerous internal documents lamenting CREEP’s lack of structure, leadership, effectiveness, and professionalism, much of it blamed on John Mitchell’s tenure, where there was no “sense of urgency” but a “great complacency.” A “confidential eyes only” memorandum indicated that Mitchell was not the “charismatic, fast-moving ass-kicking, general manager who first gives firm direction and then pushes people relentlessly in that direction.”⁴⁴³

But Colson *was* an ass-kicker, and by September with Nixon’s special counsel pulled (mostly willingly) back and forth between attack and strategy groups, and his fingers in every political pie, there was sometimes a lack of leadership and focus, especially for Democrats for Nixon. As Strachan then complained to Larry Higby, “...there is no central focus for Connally and the Democrats for Nixon. No staff man who can report directly and exactly to Bob is in charge.” What Strachan wanted was for Higby to take over the Connally and Democrats for Nixon operation as he could “control Colson [and] keep up to date on Bob’s conversations with

⁴⁴⁰ As per Larry Higby’s request of July 19, Doug Hallett wrote to Haldeman on July 20, 1972, WHSF, Contested Files, Box 53, Nixon Library.

⁴⁴¹ Memorandum from Gordon Strachan to H.R. Haldeman, June 10, 1972, WHSF, Contested Files, Box 33, Nixon Library.

⁴⁴² Memorandum from Gordon Strachan to Jeb Magruder, August 29, 1972, WHSF, Contested Files, Box 14, Nixon Library.

⁴⁴³ See undated Confidential Eyes Only, “Campaign Organizational Problems,” WHSF, Contested Files, Box 35, Nixon Library. New campaign manager Clark MacGregor it seemed fared little better in controlling events beneath him, including speaking to unauthorized members of the media. As he indicated in a memo to his staff, “From now on, no one but I will talk to any hostile reporter or any reporter from a historically hostile newspaper or magazine. This means no backgrounders by anyone at 1701 (except me) to anyone in the ‘hostile’ categories.” Please see the memorandum from Clark MacGregor to Fred Malek, Jeb Magruder, Van Shumway, and Al Abrams, August 1, 1972, Contested Files, WHSF, Box 35, Nixon Library.

Connally.”⁴⁴⁴ No one, however, was controlling Colson other than the president for more than a year, and the cracks were appearing around the edges and underneath the feet of the Nixon administration.

Also contributing to the slow roll out for the beginning of the campaign was internal polling that showed the president building what looked like an insurmountable lead on George McGovern. On August 30, Haldeman walked into the Oval Office with “a morose look” on his face. “Bad news,” the White House chief of staff stated. “I really mean it—it’s really bad.” But Haldeman was teasing his boss, as in his hands where the latest Gallup Poll showing Nixon with a commanding 34 point lead over his Democratic challenger.⁴⁴⁵ As it turned out, though, the growing lead over McGovern was not good news as it detracted from the campaign’s early momentum. After Labor Day with the president well ahead in the polls, the campaign organization discovered to its surprise that it had difficulty in recruiting volunteers to work the telephones as the lead had “created considerable apathy” among the president’s supporters. Apathy translated into alarm in the White House, and the new driving term became “turnout,” one driven by voter identification and canvassing for the remainder of September and throughout October, especially in the battleground states.⁴⁴⁶ For the field campaign, the team decided to concentrate on the “fundamental premise” that while Richard Nixon “had sufficient support to win the election,” their efforts would have to identify and target “favorable voters rather than persuading undecided voters and guaranteeing that the support was translated into votes on election day.” Turnout indeed became the operative term.⁴⁴⁷ In order to get people out to vote for Richard Nixon in November, the word went out directly from the Oval Office through Haldeman that there would be absolutely no talk of “landslides or mandates,” rather, the message was that they were “seeking a decisive majority.” There would be no “reliance on polls” but a fight for every vote, taking their “case to every state.” Above all, no one in the White House or at CREEP would be “predicting any win.”⁴⁴⁸

Even Charles Colson, who was so troubled by public opinion polls in the opening days of 1972, knew by summer’s end that they were going to win big in the fall. He also cautioned his men not to use the terms “mandate” and “landslide” in reference to Nixon’s reelection. Colson wanted to hit this home in the talking points for the surrogates heading out on the campaign trail. “These are phrases that will merely frighten Democrats and worry a lot of people who think it’s a bad thing for there to be a landslide,” Colson wrote. The special counsel was very aware of the impression some in the middle had about the nature of the Republican Party under Nixon’s leadership, and thus was concerned that they would alienate those who wanted to reject McGovern as a possible president but were wary of a “mandate” for the Nixon administration. “As we talk about mandate, landslide and Republican Congress, we tend to frighten these people

⁴⁴⁴ Memorandum from Gordon Strachan to Larry Higby, September 25, 1972, WHSF, Contested Files, Box 14, Nixon Library.

⁴⁴⁵ See Nixon, *RN*, 679-680. See also the results of the Gallup Poll, the *Washington Post*, August 30, 1972, A2.

⁴⁴⁶ “Critique of the 1972 Campaign,” memorandum from Pat Buchanan to the President, WHSF, Box 33, Nixon Library. See also “Target ’72, Sixty Days to Victory: A Program for Voter Identification & Turnout,” WHSF, Box 33, Nixon Library.

⁴⁴⁷ “Critique of the 1972 Campaign,” memorandum from Pat Buchanan to the President, WHSF, Box 33, Nixon Library. See also “Target ’72, Sixty Days to Victory: A Program for Voter Identification & Turnout,” WHSF, Box 33, Nixon Library.

⁴⁴⁸ H.R. Haldeman, Oval Office notes, October 5, 1972, Haldeman Papers, Box 46, NARA.

into not voting for us.” The message to the surrogates was that any boasting about what would happen on Election Day would be “counterproductive.”⁴⁴⁹

Despite these worries and delays, the immense campaign machine, which had initially sputtered, finally had begun to roll and roared to life with nationwide canvassing and surrogates out in fifty local headquarters in the country, helping to drive a massive grassroots campaign. The local storefront operations were charged with voter identification, registration, and turnout.⁴⁵⁰ The campaign in the field was actually among the most well organized in modern electoral history. Using a comprehensive system of voter contact, the team hoped to capitalize on the president’s high visibility and familiarity to voters. The decision from the morning strategy meetings was to maximize individual voter contact through door-to-door canvassing, telephone canvassing, and targeted mailing in all large and key battleground states. The efforts were coordinated through the use of a list of registered voters in a computerized data bank. The team cross-referenced household information and other demographics to target specific mail outs, and also the use of telephones and door-to-door operations. All information gathered was analyzed and dumped back into the computer. The team was especially interested in targeting potential Democratic voters who would vote for Nixon. At the local level, door-to-door canvassing and informal telephone centers targeted favorable supporters rather than scores of undecided voters. The main assumption going in from Buchanan and his team was that the surrogate program would be highly effective. The surrogates’ job was to reach voters “while controlling the exposure to the candidate.” The group of about three-dozen, including cabinet ministers, senators, congressmen, and selected members of the White House staff, were scheduled throughout the states for the duration of the campaign. The plan was simple: attack the Democratic leader and present the president’s record in a positive light and get both into the media’s hands. All of this, as Buchanan recalled, allowed the president “to remain above the day-to-day campaign.” One of the aims was to goad McGovern into taking on the surrogates, which would reinforce “his image as a second-level political figure.”⁴⁵¹

The surrogate operation targeted older citizens, African-Americans, farmers, youth, as well as Spanish-speaking and Jewish Americans. The main get-out-the-vote targets were California, New York, Pennsylvania, Texas, Illinois, Ohio, Michigan, New Jersey, Maryland, and Connecticut. Local advertising was geared toward emphasizing Nixon’s “competence and incumbency,” while raising doubts about McGovern’s competency and his policies. The plan was to “legitimize” for Democrats “the idea of voting for a Republican President” through the Democrats for Nixon program. From September 25 to October 30 telephone polling allowed the team to identify target states, while large-capacity computers looked for concentrations of blue collar workers by income, race, age, and occupation. The combined polling and demographic techniques were designed to find the “Peripheral Urban Ethnics.” According to Buchanan’s strategy, their team’s computer mapping revealed rings around every metropolitan area. The first ring was the black underclass, followed by their target: the ring that included the “blue collar,

⁴⁴⁹ Memorandum from Charles Colson to Pat Buchanan, Dave Gergen, Steve Karalekas, and Ken Khachigian, October 2, 1972, Colson Papers, Box 132, NARA.

⁴⁵⁰ “Critique of the 1972 Campaign,” memorandum from Pat Buchanan to the President, WHSF, Box 33, Nixon Library. See also, “Target ’72, Sixty Days to Victory: A Program for Voter Identification & Turnout,” WHSF, Box 33, Nixon Library.

⁴⁵¹ “Critique of the 1972 Campaign,” memorandum from Pat Buchanan for the President WHSF, Box 33, Nixon Library. See also, “Target ’72, Sixty Days to Victory: A Program for Voter Identification & Turnout,” WHSF, Box 33, Nixon Library.

middle income, Democratic voters, of European ethnic background.” According to Buchanan’s research team, previous voting trends revealed that George Wallace had gained much of his support in 1968 from this ring. In 1972, their polling showed that these voters were close to the president because of his stand on social issues including crime, drugs, and busing in the south, that Haldeman, Colson and Nixon had been playing on for nearly two years. These results helped firm up the strategy to give “high priority to the ethnic precincts and to target them for the voter contact program.”⁴⁵²

The central campaign, though, was run out of the White House, controlled by Nixon’s savvy media men with Haldeman “at the top of the pyramid,” and Buchanan as the chief wordsmith and the one most responsible for placing the words in the mouths of the surrogates on the trail. He analyzed McGovern’s positions and prepared the “assault books” on the opposition’s top dog. Colson was the operation’s goad, and the president’s eyes and ears in all meetings, especially the morning ones as the attack and counter-attack groups searched media stories, creating material that appeared in the daily action memorandums and White House talking points and attack lines against their opponents. With McGovern’s national poll numbers starting to slip badly, the president’s men remained cognizant of inadvertently helping the senator out of his hole. They planned to avoid all direct attacks on the media and avoid behaving in a manner that could alienate potential Democratic voters. McGovern and his “radical” polices and “extremist” pals were the target. As Buchanan had stressed in a memo for the president file, the term “McGovernite” served to separate “the McGovern types from the regular Democrats.” The word from Nixon was to capture more “Democrats for Nixon”; the team needed to “isolate McGovern from the Party regulars.”⁴⁵³

To keep McGovern on the defensive, and “to coordinate public relations efforts against him,” the Attack Group continued to meet each morning to plan tactics for the day. This group orchestrated the attack plans of the Communications Division, the surrogate speakers, the White House staff, the vice president and the Republican National Committee. The Communications Division prepared press releases, speeches, audio feeds for radio, television film, and aided in implementing the attack plans, as well as publicizing the “positive side of the President’s record.”⁴⁵⁴ As planned in the early summer when the South Dakotan began to take the lead in the Democratic field, Nixon’s men seized upon every utterance that McGovern had made in order to dog him with charges of “amnesty, abortion, and acid.” Buchanan’s research men flooded media outlets with McGovern’s comments. “Well, if I were President, there wouldn’t be demonstrators like that,” McGovern said in regards to protestors outside the gates of the White House objecting to a widening of the war in Indochina. “Those people would be having dinner at the White House instead of protesting outside.”⁴⁵⁵ Or as he told the *Associated Press* in June, 1972, “I’ve said

⁴⁵² “Critique of the 1972 Campaign. Buchanan for the President WHSF, Box 33, Nixon Library. See also “Target ’72, Sixty Days to Victory: A Program for Voter Identification & Turnout,” WHSF, Box 33, Nixon Library.

⁴⁵³ Memorandum from Pat Buchanan for the President’s file, POF, July 21, 1972, Box 89, NARA. Nixon’s team only spent \$5 million on TV ads during the 1972 campaign. See Spear, *The Presidents and the Press*, 182.

⁴⁵⁴ “Critique of the 1972 Campaign” memorandum from Pat Buchanan to the President, WHSF, Box 33, Nixon Library. See also, “Target ’72, Sixty Days to Victory: A Program for Voter Identification & Turnout,” WHSF, Box 33, Nixon Library.

⁴⁵⁵ From interview McGovern gave with the *Philadelphia Inquirer*, April 26, 1972, found in the RNC Research Division papers from October 6, 1972, Buchanan Papers, Box 8.

many times that the Nixon policy on Indochina is the most barbaric action that any country has committed since Hitler's effort to exterminate Jews in Germany in the 1930s."⁴⁵⁶

In September 1971, McGovern told an audience in Los Angeles that he was "going to end this war and I'm going to declare a general amnesty for everyone who has resisted it."⁴⁵⁷ For Nixon's men, such utterances were pure campaign gold. They knew that they owned the Vietnam issue, and that their target voters would trust the president to make an "honorable peace" with North Vietnam rather than a "radical" whom those on Hanoi radio already stated they preferred to be in the White House.⁴⁵⁸

As Buchanan had noted for the president's file, the plan was to wage "the most intensive campaign in history . . .; we are going to carry the fight to them. Don't let him off the hook on his positions—make him say he has changed his mind." The key to a decisive victory was to lower "McGovern around the necks of the Democratic candidates" at each opportunity. They would play on the senator's "idiotic statements and force the Democrats to repudiate them. Get them to run away from him. We are 'campaigning on issues' not personalities."⁴⁵⁹ And the strategy had worked, as Buchanan later wrote. "Throughout the campaign, one consistent game-plan was followed. That was to keep McGovern identified with his earlier statements and never let him get off the defensive." As a result the senator "was never able to position himself firmly on the right side of a policy issue."⁴⁶⁰

One of the reasons that McGovern always appeared to be on the defensive was that since the summer, he had suffered from a constant assault from the nation's press. Throughout the campaign, the target of the media's wrath was clearly the Democratic nominee. By July, McGovern had taken such a beating in the media that a headline in the *Chicago Journalism Review* suggested that McGovern could not win the election "because Evans and Novak won't let him." The popular column, written by Roland Evans and Bob Novak (syndicated in 300 papers across the nation), routinely eviscerated McGovern. In numerous articles from as early as March 1972, the columnists painted the politician as part of a "fringe" movement. Even the hated *New York Times* hit McGovern hard just prior to his party's convention. McGovern's positions, warned the *Times*, "Alarm Big Donors on Wall Street. Democratic Supporters May Withhold Their Backing or Switch to Nixon."⁴⁶¹ *New York Times* columnist Tom Wicker, along with Stewart Alsop of *Newsweek*, rarely ran anything positive on McGovern. Wicker railed against McGovern on his flip-flopping and lack of any credibility on the economy.⁴⁶² Joseph Kraft in the

⁴⁵⁶ McGovern in interview with Gregg Herrington from the *Associated Press*, June 29, 1972, found in the RNC Research Division papers from October 6, 1972, Buchanan Papers, Box 8, NARA.

⁴⁵⁷ From a speech in September 25, 1971, found in the RNC Research Division papers from October 6, 1972, Buchanan Papers, Box 8, NARA.

⁴⁵⁸ See McGovern's remarks during a meeting with the South Carolina delegation reported in the *Washington Post*, June 30, 1972 that "begging was better than bombing." See also Stewart Alsop's column in *Newsweek*, July 17, 1972, 84, commenting on how Hanoi had suggested that it would rather have McGovern in the White House. The story that got a great deal of interest in the basement offices of the White House appeared in the *Washington Post* on June 13, 1972, which reprinted praises of George McGovern on Hanoi Radio by the North Vietnamese. See the memorandum from Ken Khachigian to Pat Buchanan, June 13 and 14, 1972, Khachigian Papers, Box 8, NARA. Additionally another article in the *Washington Post* detailed how Hanoi was said to prefer McGovern over other candidates. See the July 22, 1972 edition, page D15.

⁴⁵⁹ Memorandum from Pat Buchanan for the President's file, POF, July 21, 1972, Box 89, NARA.

⁴⁶⁰ "Critique of the 1972 Campaign," memorandum from Pat Buchanan to the President, WHSF, Box 33, Nixon Library.

⁴⁶¹ See James Aronson, "Journalists and the Herd Instinct," in the *New York Times*, August 3, 1972, 33.

⁴⁶² See Tom Wicker's column in the *New York Times*, June 22, 1972, 39.

Washington Post wrote that McGovern lacked the “capacity to govern,” was incapable of handling staff, showed no ability to “manage big affairs,” and appeared to “have no way of doing things independent of his staff.”⁴⁶³ And the polls largely bore this out. This was especially true with the American public’s confidence in McGovern’s ability to bring about a satisfactory end to the war. A Harris Poll of 1648 likely voters nationwide between October 24 and 26 (at a time when the administration had a lot of favorable press over Kissinger’s negotiations on a peace accord in Vietnam), showed that the administration had increased its lead to 60-32, the highest it had been since March, when it was only one percentage point lower.⁴⁶⁴

Despite this, Haldeman and Nixon always claimed to be upset with the press coverage their side received. In his notes taken in the Oval Office beside the president, the chief of staff scrawled instructions to Alexander Haig and Henry Kissinger, “Do *nothing* for CBS this week. Return *no* calls—period. An order.” And to John Ziegler, “No CBS or [*Washington*] *Post*.”⁴⁶⁵ Colson too was often incensed at the media, and often it was not necessarily the actual material relevance of the case, but just that he felt that many members of the press corps were out to “get” the president. “Since our conversation this morning of UPI, my temper has not cooled in the slightest. I really think on this one UPI owes an apology to the President. Whatever you do, don’t drop this one. UPI has been zinging us almost daily and it might be well if someone made an issue of this.”⁴⁶⁶ As Colson noted, the *New York Times* was “appalling” in its coverage of the president. The special counsel often railed about the *Times* to anyone who would listen, especially members of his staff. “It is obvious the *Times* just isn’t going to give us a fair break,” Colson wrote to Clawson. “I think you ought to make damn sure they know that we are watching and are bothered by it—bothered, hell! We are incensed! . . . Maybe we should make this ‘Dump on the *New York Times* Week.’” The *Washington Post* seldom fared any better. “The attached is bullshit!” Colson roared in reaction to a column by George Lardner criticizing the president for his lack of aid for parochial schools while giving McGovern a pass on his stance on the same issues. “Once again let’s raise hell with the *Post*.”⁴⁶⁷ Indeed, Nixon’s staff had a long history of teeing off on reporters. On a train ride during the 1960 presidential election campaign, Rose Mary Woods dumped a drink on the head of a journalist who wrote articles she didn’t like.⁴⁶⁸

Surprisingly, however, Colson actually appeared to relish the notoriety the press had given him in the corridors outside the Oval Office. The special counsel even went as far as to confirm the worst stories attributed to him in the press. “I can well understand that many of you may have gotten the wrong impression of me since so many erroneous things have found their way into print lately,” Colson wrote to members of the White House staff. “Just so you understand me, let me point out that the statement in last week’s UPI story that I was once reported to have said that ‘I would walk over my grandmother if necessary’ is absolutely true.”⁴⁶⁹

⁴⁶³ See Joseph Kraft’s column in the *Washington Post*, August 1, 1972, 19.

⁴⁶⁴ Please see Charles Colson’s discussion with pollster Lou Harris, October 27, 1972, WHSF, Contested Files, Box 1, Nixon Library. Indeed, since there was the appearance of negotiated settlement, the administration believed that it would continue to be their issue.

⁴⁶⁵ H.R. Haldeman, Oval Office notes, October 28, 1972, Haldeman Papers, Box 46, NARA.

⁴⁶⁶ Memorandum from Charles Colson to Ken Clawson, July 26, 1972, Colson Papers, Box 132, NARA.

⁴⁶⁷ Memorandum from Charles Colson to Ken Clawson, September 19, 1972, and September 20, 1972, Colson Papers, Box 132, NARA.

⁴⁶⁸ See the *New York Times*, December 25, 2005, E32. For more on the relationship between Nixon’s loyalists and the press see also Whitehead, *Annals of Television*, 60; Safire, *Before the Fall*, 342-43, and Nixon, *RN*, 355.

⁴⁶⁹ Memorandum from Charles Colson to the Staff, August 28, 1972, Colson Papers, Box 132, NARA.

For all of the criticism against the media, the team used the friendly journalists as a matter of routine to get their message out. Buchanan's files contain several memos to various members of the press corps indicating how to shape Republican arguments against McGovern. As Buchanan suggested to Paul Martin from *U.S. News & World Report* (at his request), that since Catholics and white ethnic voters (Irish, Italian, Polish, Slavic, etc.) "are very family oriented and neighborhood oriented," they would see "the McGovern emphasis on forced integration of housing and schools...as threats to their way of life." As the strategist emphasized, these Americans are very patriotic, and "view McGovern as associated with flag-burners and Viet Cong sympathizers." What Buchanan always liked to drive home was that these citizens resented being "the butt of jokes of the radical chic, the Polish jokes, the Italian jokes, the scorn of the Park Avenue revolutionaries—and McGovern is surrounded by their cultural adversaries."⁴⁷⁰

Indeed, media attacks became good for business. Colson believed that any attack against the Nixon administration—no matter the source—should be used as an "opportunity" to attack the Democratic nominee on the campaign trail. "Use it as an excuse to create a news forum to make a charge against McGovern," Colson wrote in a note on September 8. "Don't be concerned whether the charge is relevant to his attack which promotes our counterattack."⁴⁷¹ The McGovern campaign also provided a lot of grist for the mill for Nixon's team and members of the media. Planting story ideas with friendly journalists and editors and then using the results for fuel for talking points on the campaign trail became as common as breakfast. While the charge was often that the media was against the Nixon administration, it had plenty of allies in the national and regional press. Colson and Buchanan's operation spent fruitful time gathering articles that aided in their portrayal of McGovern as a dangerous radical at odds with the nation's morals and values. McGovern's campaign white paper sent to the media on October 7 attacking Nixon's record on individual rights while supporting policies to end the harassment and discrimination against groups including homosexuals brought about a great deal of attention, and little of it positive.

McGovern's position on ending discrimination in obtaining insurance, housing, and dishonorable discharges from the military for gays, to some observers, placed the senator on the far left of the political spectrum. On this point, the campaign always had a willing friend in William Loeb, the publisher of the *Manchester Union Leader*. "Not only is George McGovern supported by all the revolutionary scum in the United States—those who have attempted revolutionary violence not only in our streets but also in our courts and to our laws are almost 100 per cent behind McGovern—but note also that the homosexuals are there too," Loeb wrote in an editorial. "This newspaper has never heard George McGovern repudiate the support for the revolutionaries or the homosexuals, so he can't blame the voters if they judge him accordingly." The Democratic nominee's support for "male and female homosexuals, revolutionaries, and draft dodgers," needed to be repudiated. Three weeks before the general election, the paper made it clear that the American people should not support George McGovern. Loeb doubted why any American would support the Democrat now that "everyone else knows what Senator McGovern *really* stands for."⁴⁷² While Loeb and his publication were not exactly indicative of the national media, the substance of his message was actually penned by several members of the more

⁴⁷⁰ Letter from Pat Buchanan to Paul Martin of *U.S. News & World Report*, September 3, 1972, found in Buchanan Papers, Box 2, NARA.

⁴⁷¹ Charles Colson's Note for the File, September 8, 1972, Colson Papers, Box 132, NARA.

⁴⁷² *Manchester Union Leader*, October 17, 1972, 1, 5. See also Colson Papers, Box 80, NARA.

mainstream press, including Joseph Kraft, Nick Thimmesch, Robert Novak, Roland Evans, Clayton Fritchey, Crosby S. Noyes, Jack Rosenthal, and Stewart Alsop.⁴⁷³ McGovern could not have been happy with the press coverage during the campaign. As columnist Mary McGrory wrote, “the feeling grows that McGovern against Richard Nixon is Boris Spassky against Bobby Fischer.” McGovern, she pointed out, “drones along in a reedy monotone” while stepping “on his good lines and wanders off into marshy subordinate clauses.” The *New York Times*’ Anthony Lewis told his readers that McGovern is “turning off his own supporters” with an “aura of bumbling,” including the senator’s “on-again-off-again welfare and tax proposals, the Eagleton fiasco and his current desperate flailings about everything under the sun.”⁴⁷⁴

By the middle of summer, the *Wall Street Journal* was referring to Nixon’s opposition as the “McGovernites,” instead of the Democrats.⁴⁷⁵ As historian Stanley Kutler pointed out, “The media remained useful to Nixon as an instrument for manipulation as well as an object of public scorn.”⁴⁷⁶ Even the *Washington Post* “muted its editorial attacks” on Nixon in November.⁴⁷⁷ McGovern never complained so much about his own press coverage but rather about how it differed fundamentally from the president’s. “I was subjected to the close, critical reporting that is a tradition in American politics... Yet Mr. Nixon escaped a similar scrutiny. The press never really laid a glove on him.”⁴⁷⁸

Throughout the fall campaign, Nixon and his men kept swinging their gloves at the senator from South Dakota. The attacks were relentless. The team worked intently on connecting McGovern to “radicals” and those they believed were out of touch with the mainstream of American political thought. When McGovern floated the name of former Attorney General Ramsey Clark to replace the late J. Edgar Hoover as director of the FBI, the word from the White House to the surrogates was that electing McGovern would “run the risk of placing the F.B.I. in the hands of a milquetoast like Ramsey Clark whom Mr. Hoover himself called a ‘jellyfish’ and a ‘softie’ before he died.” McGovern’s interest in the controversial Clark was not only “naïve” but “dangerous.”⁴⁷⁹ Smelling blood, Colson eagerly jumped all over the Clark issue. The political operative wanted a sustained series of attacks on the Democratic nominee over Clark as the Bureau’s director. “Let’s keep kicking hell out of McGovern on this,” blasted Colson in a memo to Dick Howard. “We need to constantly remind people . . . Let’s be sure in our discussions during our 9:15 meetings, that we are constantly seeking opportunities to exploit this point.”⁴⁸⁰

One of the opportunities was to dig up dirt on the McGovern family. Among the targets was McGovern’s daughter Susan, whose marriage to James Rowan, described as “a bearded, self-proclaimed Socialist revolutionary,” provided even more ammunition. Staffers were especially interested when the White House Social Office could find no mention of Susan by the family nor was she photographed with any members of the nominee’s family. “Apparently,” Ed Harper wrote, it was “because she has chosen to become a part of what is sometimes termed ‘the

⁴⁷³ Please see the immense newspaper files in Pat Buchanan’s papers in the National Archives, particularly in Box 8, NARA.

⁴⁷⁴ Please see the *Wall Street Journal*, September 22, 1972, 8. Lewis is quoted in McGrory’s article.

⁴⁷⁵ See the *Wall Street Journal*, August 2, 1972, 8.

⁴⁷⁶ Kutler, *The Wars of Watergate*, 197.

⁴⁷⁷ Kutler, *The Wars of Watergate*, 236-237.

⁴⁷⁸ White, *The Making of the President*, 1972, 267.

⁴⁷⁹ Memorandum from Jack McDonald to Pat Buchanan, September 14, 1972, Buchanan Papers, Box 8, NARA.

⁴⁸⁰ Memorandum from Charles Colson to Dick Howard, August 28, 1972, Colson Papers, Box 132, NARA.

counter culture.”⁴⁸¹ The team’s guns were aimed in all directions, including at George McGovern’s replacement for the disgraced Senator Eagleton on the vice presidential ticket. Kennedy cousin and the first director of the Peace Corps, Robert Sargent Shriver, soon learned what it was like to be a marked man. Whereas the original plan was to largely ignore both the arrival and significance of Shriver, and focus on McGovern, things changed after a long conversation Chuck Colson had with the president on the morning of September 12. Following that, Nixon suggested to Haldeman that they could make use of the “liability” that the Democratic running mate presented and “start cracking him.” Within a few days, Haldeman scrawled onto his yellow legal pad, “Shriver—destroy him—his credibility on VN [Vietnam] peace issue.” The thrust in the Oval Office conversation with the president was that attacking Shriver’s lack of knowledge about Southeast Asia was a winning tactic, one that they needed to keep “alive long enough to kill him.” The goal was to “tie [Ramsay Clark] to McGovern then tie Clark and Shriver together as [a] double-edged hoax turning VN for political purposes.”⁴⁸²

However, despite these musings about actual policy differences, the attack on Sargent Shriver took on a life of its own, as the team used some more sensational material that they had mined just a few weeks earlier. An operative was sent to Shriver’s Alma mater, Yale, to sift through anything that the candidate may have written. The team was especially interested in anything Shriver may have penned for the America First Movement in 1940-41. The plan was to turn anything they found directly over to the “hated” media.⁴⁸³ This included a whole host of slips and misstatements. When Shriver used a poor choice of words concerning Civil War veterans, the attack team made sure his utterances hit southern papers. Speaking before labor leaders in Rock Island, Illinois, on October 2, Shriver was making the case for amnesty for deserters, and used Abraham Lincoln’s amnesty for Confederate soldiers after the war as an example. His idea was that if the nation could forgive those who killed “Yankees with guns, you know—killing—not deserters or conscientious objectors, but *traitors*—fighting on the other side,” then how could it not forgive American citizens who did not take up arms against anyone. The attack team portrayed Shriver’s unfortunate choice of words as a slight against all those who fought on the side of the Confederacy, by belittling them as “traitors.” It was a way to turn the argument on amnesty on its head while driving a wedge between Southern voters and the Democratic Party.

The reaction was predictable. Georgia Congressman Fletcher Thompson blasted Shriver. “I bitterly resent Shriver putting the people in the South who fought to defend their homeland in the same category with those who deserted this country and fled rather than do their duty.” Shriver was not only painted as an enemy of the South but as someone unpatriotic to the core, not even knowing the words to the National Anthem. When speaking on the stump in early October, Shriver ended his speech with “the home of the free and the land of the brave.” As the press release indicated, “Any school child can tell you that the final words of the Star Spangled Banner are ‘the land of the free and the home of the brave.’ . . . This isn’t too alarming, however, because the ticket which wants to fly the American flag upside down in South Vietnam should be expected to get the words of the National Anthem backwards.”⁴⁸⁴

⁴⁸¹ Memorandum from Ed Harper to Todd Hullin, September 19, 1972, WHCF, Box 50, Nixon Library.

⁴⁸² H.R. Haldeman, Oval Office Notes, September 19, 1972, Haldeman Papers, Box 46, NARA, and Haldeman, *Haldeman Diaries*, 503, referencing September 12, 1972 conversation between the President and Colson.

⁴⁸³ Internal memorandums of October 11, 1972, Khachigian Papers, Box 9, NARA.

⁴⁸⁴ Internal memorandums of October 11, 1972, Khachigian Papers, Box 9, NARA.

Among the smears was to point out that Shriver came from a slave-holding family in Maryland, and that their lives of luxury were earned off the backs of indentured servants. The releases included sound bites on the mementoes in the Shriver family home in Maryland, such as the kitchen bells “used to summon the slaves and indentured servants,” and handbills printed by David Shriver in 1809 offering \$30 for a runaway slave. Nixon’s men were all over Shriver’s comment that none of his ancestors fought on the side of the Union when traveling in the Deep South. The line for speeches was that “Mr. Shriver boasted that of eight of his forebears of military age during the Civil War, six had served on Dixie’s side and two stayed home, but ‘none of them fought on the other side.’” The August 31 release to the media tried to paint Shriver as the worst kind of bigot to black voters. As the surrogate and media brief indicated, “One must wonder if Mr. Shriver also approves so highly of the slaveholdings of his ancestors which today makes his aristocratic life so comfortable and continues to make the lives of millions of blacks of bare subsistence.”⁴⁸⁵

Internal memorandums, however, revealed the cynicism over any sensitivity in the black community. The team knew there was much more electoral cash in racial fear and loathing in the south than in the black vote. As Dick McCormack wrote to Pat Buchanan,

Passed the Watergate McGovern headquarters the other day and noticed a striking new poster—Hands that Pick Cotton Can Now Pick Our Leaders—Vote McGovern. Depicted is a long black arm reaching out toward a cotton ball. This may be a dandy at the Watergate and at the corner of 14th and R St. But can you imagine the impact of the poster at every Southern court house, every Union Hall, every ethnic club, in every Cicero, Ill? Why don’t we have some of the boys duplicate that poster and give it wider circulation than the Democrats intended. Both our ‘heritage’ organizations and Demos for Nixon would be ideal for vehicles for distribution.⁴⁸⁶

There were several levels of political attacks underway against the Democrats, though, setting up ways of separating the Democrats from each other and from their base, and some of these had been underway since the spring. Among the strategies was to have staff assistant to the president on Ehrlichman’s Domestic Council staff, Sallyanne Payton, do research on the black vote as part of the team’s re-election strategy. As Payton’s memorandum suggested, “Make the democrats look bad. Our objective here is to get the black vote to stay at home in November. The principal Democratic candidates—Muskie, Humphrey, McGovern—have no particular image in the black community and inspire no particular enthusiasm. Their strength will come from an anti-Nixon vote. It is therefore critical to avoid having a large black turnout. The strategy must be to make the Republican and Democratic parties look like Tweedledum and Tweedledee.” On April 17, 1972, Ehrlichman forwarded the document to Haldeman for a look. Ehrlichman suggested that the chief of staff “give it to Fred Malek or whoever has the operational responsibility for this sort of thing.”⁴⁸⁷ Not surprisingly, the *Washington Post*’s William Raspberry believed that Nixon cared little about civil rights or any other issues faced by black Americans. The president, he argued, “isn’t about the business of eliminating black people. He’s about the business of *ignoring*

⁴⁸⁵ Briefs of August 31, 1972, Khachigian Papers, Box 8, and Buchanan Papers, Box 9, NARA.

⁴⁸⁶ Letter from Dick McCormack to Pat Buchanan, September 11, 1972, Box 48, WHSF, Nixon Library. See also Sallyanne Payton’s memorandum to Ken Cole, March 10, 1972, on their efforts to keep the black vote at home in November, 1972. See memo in WHCF, Box 33, Nixon Library.

⁴⁸⁷ Memorandum from Sallyanne Payton to Kenneth Cole, March 10, 1972, WHCF, Contested Files, Box 33, Nixon Library, and John Ehrlichman to H.R. Haldeman, April 17, 1972, WHSF, Box 34, Nixon Library.

them, leaving them to their natural enemies.” Raspberry noted that Nixon appealed to “the baser instincts of people who see black progress as inimical to their own interests.”⁴⁸⁸

The daily attack group meetings at 9:15 am had made it clear that there was to be nothing hysterical or “emotional” in tenor in response to attacks. Any “whining” would make them appear like their Democratic rival. The goal was to keep McGovern looking like the one engaging in “shrill” attacks. The vice president breaking ranks would be counterproductive and would send the wrong message, one that could be used against them in the media. Therefore, when McGovern blasted the Nixon administration before the *United Press International* editors’ meeting in early October, suggesting that it was the most corrupt administration in American history, the word was to “turn the other cheek,” and not respond. But as Rowland Evans and Robert Novak indicated, “Agnew didn’t get the word.” Colson bristled when the vice president blasted back while on the stump in Rapid City, South Dakota, letting loose with what members of the media called an “emotional” attack on the Democratic leader. Colson was livid and sent word down the internal wire that decisions in the 9:15 am mornings were the law and surrogates, no matter who they were, were “to fall in line.”⁴⁸⁹

A memo from Buchanan to the president the next day, however, suggested that the ranks were not too upset about Agnew’s comments and their ultimate meaning for the election. As Buchanan wrote, “With four weeks to go the political situation seems to have stabilized.” The speechwriter knew that McGovern was bleeding; indeed, according to the polls, the Democratic candidate was “hardly moving at all, according to [Lou] Harris.”⁴⁹⁰ Interestingly, just days earlier, Bob Woodward and Carl Bernstein ran a story in the *Washington Post* alleging that John Mitchell had controlled a secret campaign fund, with implications that it may have been somehow connected to the break-in at the Watergate, even though the piece admitted that a grand jury “did not establish that the intelligence-gathering fund directly financed the illegal eavesdropping.” Despite the sensationalism of this story mere weeks before Americans went to the polls, media scrutinizers within the White House, like Pat Buchanan, knew that it meant little to their reelection efforts.⁴⁹¹ What concerned Buchanan at that point was that many of those who told Lou Harris they supported Nixon might stay home on Election Day. He, like others, worried about an “apathetic electorate and the low turnout.” The political strategist thought that there was a kind of irony in the electoral salad they faced, as where once the “liberal press” had suggested that the “aroused and alienated electorate” would go for “McGovern’s kind in politics,” the reality now was that it looked like Nixon was going to capture the disaffected and their own traditional voting bloc might stay home. Despite this prospect, it did not lend itself to a change in strategy for the president’s team. As Buchanan noted, “There seems to be some truth in the possibility of a low turnout [and] over-confident Republicans. . . We ought to be giving this problem serious consideration—although I do not believe it at all calls for RN to hit the stump at this point in time.” The watchful strategist worried, though, that the entire strategy might backfire, as they would not be able to fight back against “smears” in the press on the president. Buchanan always lamented about the media. It was in his nature. At issue was that he believed that an angry press would charge that Nixon had used the White House to his unfair advantage,

⁴⁸⁸ See the *Washington Post*, September 18, 1972, A23.

⁴⁸⁹ See Evans and Novak column in the *Washington Post*, October 8, 1972, and Charles Colson’s memorandums to staff on October 8, 9, and 10, 1972, Khachigian Papers, Box 9, NARA. See also John Ehrlichman, Oval Office Notes, June 9, 1972, Ehrlichman Papers, Box 6, NARA.

⁴⁹⁰ Memorandum from Pat Buchanan to the President, October 9, 1972, WHSF, Contested Files, Box 1, Nixon Library.

⁴⁹¹ Please see the *Washington Post*, September 29, 1972., A1, A13.

and worse, that the president would be criticized for “ignoring the issues, playing above-the-battle, refusing to ‘engage’ in campaign debate ... and appears headed for a landslide.” While all of this was quite true, Buchanan was concerned that members of the media would do what they could “to see the gap closed” between the candidates. In his office in the Old Executive Office Building, Buchanan and his men held their breath and concluded that the focus of the last few weeks of the campaign of 1972 would remain on “McGovern’s screw-ups and incompetence and his radicalism.” Despite his instincts, and those of his boss, the loyal strategist and speechwriter stressed that “the President should stay out of the attack business altogether.”⁴⁹²

Less than a week later, Buchanan was worried about the past coming back to haunt them, and fired off an administratively confidential political memorandum to Haldeman, Colson, and Ehrlichman. His concern was that the team not “freeze the ball” just because they enjoyed a “twenty-odd point lead, and three and half weeks to go—as we did in 1968.” Seemingly forgetting about earlier memos concerning developing better relations with the press, Buchanan suggested that one way to keep the fires going without burning the president was to attack the *Washington Post* “head-on” over its investigations into Watergate, which Buchanan called “desperate” and “last-ditch” efforts to “smear” the president before the election. Knowing that Nixon would stay out of the fight, the speechwriter was on a charge. As he reminded Haldeman, Colson, and Ehrlichman, “The next ten days are crucial to breaking the back of the McGovern campaign; we ought not to be holding back material now.”⁴⁹³ Three days later, Buchanan sent yet another memo to Haldeman and Colson looking to attack McGovern by taking “out ads in all major black publications attacking McGovern for taking blacks for granted.” He also wanted the president photographed at religious services to counteract charges of corruption in the *Washington Post*. Haldeman was not impressed with either idea. Trying to keep the lid on his more emotional men, the White House chief of staff simply scrawled on the memo in reply, “I disagree on both. H.”⁴⁹⁴

With less than a month left to go before Americans went to the polls, however, Chuck Colson was still charging around the White House and down the hallways of the Old Executive Office Building, cracking the whip. As he reminded Henry Cashen, “There are still 28 days left and plenty of time for a lot more exploiting.” The president’s very special counsel wanted to impress upon all staff that doing for the president was the only thing that mattered, and that they were to think of “ways in which you can wake up in the morning and say to yourself, ‘What will I do today to help re-elect the President.’”⁴⁹⁵ As the remaining opportunities to close the gap disappeared between him and the president, it was becoming apparent that there was little George McGovern could do to make up ground. Even sports prognosticator “Jimmy the Greek”

⁴⁹² Memorandum from Pat Buchanan to the President, October 9, 1972, WHSF, Contested Files, Box 1, Nixon Library.

⁴⁹³ Administratively Confidential Political Memorandum from Pat Buchanan to H.R. Haldeman, Charles Colson, and John Ehrlichman, October 13, 1972, WHSF, Contested Files, Box 1, Nixon Library. Just three days before, on October 10, *Washington Post* junior reporters Carl Bernstein and Bob Woodward ran an article linking disruptions during the Democratic campaign to CREEP.

⁴⁹⁴ Memorandum from Pat Buchanan to H.R. Haldeman and Charles Colson, October 16, 1972, WHSF, Contested Files, Box 1, Nixon Library. In a memo dated the same day to Haldeman, Buchanan called the *Post* “idiotic,” “vile and filthy,” in regards to attacks on the president. The speechwriter referred to their opponent as an “imposter” and a “pious fraud.”

⁴⁹⁵ Memorandum from Charles Colson to Henry Cashen, October 10, 1972, Colson Papers, Box 132, NARA.

gave Herb Klein 15 to 1 odds that the president would prevail over McGovern on election day. The reason was that Americans considered him not a Democrat but a “McGovernite.” Klein prepared a memo on the subject for the president. Nixon liked it and scribbled in the margin for Klein to show it to Colson, a request with which the communications man promptly complied.⁴⁹⁶

Inside the war for the White House, it had become clear that there were tremendous strains that resulted from leaving the president out of the fight. There was a great deal of tension regarding the policy of the president remaining above the fray, especially with only a few weeks left before Americans cast their ballots. Colson was feeling the pressure from the troops at the regular morning meetings in the White House, as there was growing disagreement over their chosen course of action. As Colson pointed out to Haldeman, “There were 11 people at the 8:15 meeting and 11 different opinions.” Colson, however, did not mind telling everyone that there was only one way, and that was not subject to debate. “MacGregor is absolutely furious that I raised the subject and was as angry as I have ever seen him.” The special counsel to the president informed the White House chief of staff that MacGregor, Klein, Weinberger, and Ehrlichman were adamant that Nixon get out of the White House and do more “presidential events.” Not surprisingly, Colson found himself fencing with Ehrlichman again, suggesting to Haldeman that the president’s chief domestic adviser “continued to make the point that there are innumerable opportunities for ‘Presidential’ campaign appearances but when pressed couldn’t name a specific single one.” Colson cared even less for Clark MacGregor’s input. “The big argument comes from MacGregor that our 1 million volunteers need to be charged up and need to know that the President is working and campaigning.” What angered Colson the most was the idea that having the president out on the stump would counter stories on Watergate. As the special counsel fumed, “That is absolute bullcrap.” Colson knew that little was to be gained by a late campaign run when they were so far ahead in the polls. “In my view, intense campaigning will rejuvenate the McGovern camp, will bring us head to head with them on the networks every night, will energize partisan Democratic loyalties, will remind millions of people of the Candidate Nixon and will turn a landslide into a horserace.” Colson, though, understood the pressure that MacGregor was under, and knew that John Mitchell had his ear to the ground on partisan discontent, yet he remained at a loss to explain the attitude of the person who was supposedly the president’s key domestic adviser. “Ehrlichman I can’t explain,” Colson wrote. In the end, the special counsel was letting Haldeman know that *he* was looking out for the president and that appearances be damned. “In short, there was no consensus on anything except that I was the skunk at this morning’s lawn party....Let the media bitch like hell that we are hiding in the White House.”⁴⁹⁷

The president of course was neither hiding nor alone on Pennsylvania Ave. The plan that was hatched in the dark days following the 1970 midterm elections was working, and those in Nixon’s inner circle did not want to have a disaster at the 11th hour. The internal tension increased over concerns that a few well positioned mistakes could sink their political ship. When Haldeman got wind that staffers Gordon Price and Henry Dent had sent letters of best wishes to state Republican candidates over the president’s signature and sought permission to do more through Gordon Strachan, the chief of staff was furious. Higby had tipped Haldeman off with a note in pen: “Apparently Harry Dent has the power to decide who the President endorses.”

⁴⁹⁶ See memorandum from Herb Klein to the President, September 22, 1972, and Herb Klein to Charles Colson September 25, 1972, POF, Box 18, NARA.

⁴⁹⁷ Memorandum from Charles Colson to H.R. Haldeman, October 18, 1972, WHSF, Contested Files, Box 40, Nixon Library. For media references, please see Spear, *The Presidents and the Press*, 31-32, 176, 178.

Unfortunately, some of the campaign letters of best wishes had already gone out. Haldeman naturally was furious, and scrawled back to Strachan, “*Dent or Price has no authority to issue endorsements.*”⁴⁹⁸ Haldeman had been hearing it from numerous sources inside the White House that they needed to keep the lid on errors in the last few weeks of the campaign. Even Buchanan assistant Ken Khachigian was warning the chief of staff of the dangers. “For God’s sake, let the word go out to all staff that the smallest mistake of judgment could foul everything.”⁴⁹⁹

But things never turned around for McGovern and the attacks from the Nixon camp never let up. That fall, there was no question around the White House concerning how to handle their Democratic opponent. As Nixon had pointed out quite clearly, “When you’ve got a fellow . . . who is under attack like this, who has fallen on his ass a few times, what you do is to kick him again. I mean, you have to keep whacking, whacking, and whacking.”⁵⁰⁰ However, while “whacking” the opposition was good, the blood was not to soil Nixon’s image as a statesman. While hammering on their opponent’s weak points, they had to refrain from mixing attacks against their opponent with presidential accomplishments. Speechwriter Pat Buchanan had lobbied for this course of action and it is a strategy that won the day in the Oval Office. Nixon and Haldeman knew that the best way to counter any criticism against the administration that might appear in the press was to deflect this attention back on their Democratic challengers. What they wanted was to “stay on the negative side. Do not try to weave in . . . the positive,” as “there should be an attack program that is purely attack.” Haldeman believed that the attack should remain “pure” of discussions on foreign policy because they did not want to mar the president’s perceived strength as a diplomat. The president agreed with Haldeman and Buchanan that he could play his foreign policy strength while his campaign machine went after McGovern. They knew that the president’s image as a “peacemaker” and elder statesman because of his trips to Moscow and China was a card he could continue to play. In the Oval Office, Nixon and his chief of staff boiled it down to its most basic element:

Haldeman: Except foreign—you, you hammer your strong point.

Nixon: I just think you’ve got to hit that over and over again ‘cause, goddamn it, we gotta win our election.

Haldeman: . . . and that attack [should] not have anything on Nixon strong points.

Nixon: Right.

Haldeman: It should only make McGovern negative points.

Nixon: Yeah.⁵⁰¹

The various efforts of Nixon’s loyal reelection team were achieving results. The president was able to remain holed up in the White House out of the public eye. As Colson pointed out, by the last two weeks of the election, most Americans who intended to vote for the president based upon his record had already made up their minds. As a result, there were those on Nixon’s staff who thought there was little to be gained by having the president speak for the merits of his own

⁴⁹⁸ See Memorandum from Gordon Strachan to H.R. Haldeman, October 18, 1972; Haldeman’s handwritten response; and Larry Higby’s attached note on the memorandum. These documents are found in WHSF, Contested Files, Box 39, Nixon Library.

⁴⁹⁹ Memorandum from Ken Khachigian to H.R. Haldeman, October 4, 1972, WHSF, Contested Files, Box 40, Nixon Library.

⁵⁰⁰ WHT, Conversation No. 760-9, August 3, 1972, NARA.

⁵⁰¹ WHT, Conversation No. 343-36, June 23, 1972, NARA. In an August 14 memorandum, the president indicated that name-calling would not work with McGovern. You had to hit him on the policies. For example, McGovern should not be called a socialist, but the point was that his policies reflected “socialist dogma.” See Presidential Memorandum, August 14, 1972, POF, Box 89, NARA.

record. Nor did Colson believe it was in the interests of anyone else in the White House to spend time, money, or effort exalting the president's list of accomplishments. Two weeks before the election, Colson made this point perfectly clear in a memo to Haldeman. Colson's "seat of the pants political instincts" and his analysis of polling data convinced him that those Americans still unsure about the president would not be swayed by "China, Russia, SALT, or any other positive Nixon accomplishment." Colson understood the reality that some would choose his boss simply because he was "the lesser of evils," or that many voters were simply "turned off by McGovern." As a result, instead of building up the president, the political team wanted to target the anti-McGovern voters and those wary of supporting the senator from South Dakota. "The key objective in my mind in the next two weeks is to keep the undecided voter and the lukewarm Nixon support turned off on McGovern . . . I, therefore, believe that positive advertising will accomplish little if anything in the last two weeks of the campaign." A series of "classy commercials" would only detract from efforts to keep the public "unsold on McGovern." Therefore, what emerged was what Colson called the "negative negative strategy" to prevent McGovern from persuading Democrats who believe that while McGovern is a "horse's ass," they would hold their noses and cast their votes for him instead of the president. "We have to continue to make him so unattractive that no matter how bad a picture he paints of us, they still will come to us instead of him." Negative campaign ads were a strategy that the Nixon team used well down the stretch and one that the McGovern side failed to utilize until the end, and with Watergate failing to gain much traction as an issue in the national press, this reality came much to the relief of the Nixon attack team. According to Colson, "thank God [McGovern] didn't think of [negative attack ads] sooner." The team, though, had no plans to relent on the attack, which they would wage with surrogates throughout the country, and heavy use of anti-McGovern newspaper ads and television commercials. "Only the attack and the ads will keep those who are against McGovern against McGovern."⁵⁰²

Political attacks became increasingly easy as Election Day neared, especially on the Vietnam issue. The president appeared to be making serious progress towards peace in Southeast Asia (which he was) while showing how McGovern was wrong on the issues, and unaware (which he was) of what was really going on in negotiations with the North Vietnamese. Buchanan and his crew had been churning out the speeches for the surrogates with good effect for weeks, especially those delivered by former Democrat and Texas governor John Connally.⁵⁰³

⁵⁰² Colson also admitted that they probably could win the election "by doing absolutely nothing for the next fourteen days." The nature of the campaign, though, was to keep fighting as if they were far behind. See Memorandum from Charles Colson to H.R. Haldeman, October 23, 1972, Colson Papers, Box 132, NARA.

⁵⁰³ As a speech written for Connally by Pat Buchanan suggested, "McGovern's pullout of all American equipment from the South—while Communist guns and planes and artillery continue to pour into the North—would be the greatest act of betrayal in the history of this Republic." See memorandum from Pat Buchanan to Charles Colson and H.R. Haldeman, October 11, 1972, Buchanan Box 5 NARA. Connally had always delivered the script well, arguing convincingly that his former party had been taken over by "McGovernites" that would "control the Democratic Party for years to come." As Connally stated, "Mr. McGovern and his confederates will lead us down the blind allies of radicalism, defeatism and isolationism.... That is why I am asking every Democrat to cast a vote against extremism on November Seventh." See his speech of October 20 found in Buchanan Papers, Box 5, NARA.

* Sandbagging was a usual operative term concerning the politics of Vietnam. On one occasion, Colson got a contact from the *Chicago Tribune* to call Gary Hart and tell him that McGovern was gaining rapidly, closing the gap in the polls. It was an attempt to manipulate Hart into calling a news conference based on the faulty information just before the real poll results were announced that Monday. With both the president and Colson laughing on the tape, the special counsel cracked: "It'll sandbag him. Jesus, it'll sandbag him." Nixon: "Sandbag them always, that's right." See WHT, Conversation no. 147-9, October 7, 1972, NARA.

A good illustration of this was the “agreement to agree” on a nine-point cease-fire draft treaty for peace with the North on October 26 brokered by Henry Kissinger in secret talks held in Paris. The announcement was part of an agreement reached in secret back on May 8. At a White House press conference, Kissinger told the nation that “We believe that we have an agreement in sight.”⁵⁰⁴ The event held less than two weeks before the election not only sandbagged McGovern but represented the first public comments about the secret talks in the French capital.* The signing of the agreement was to take place within a few days, but it was clear that Nixon and Kissinger were not going to let that take place, citing two outstanding points, the release of POWS and post-cease-fire arms shipments. On November 2, Nixon announced that there would be no signing until those outstanding issues had been settled.⁵⁰⁵

The promise of imminent peace with honor was political gold, and the day of the Kissinger announcement, Colson and the president were jubilant not only for what it meant to the election but that Watergate would continue to be a non-issue. “This is heaven sent the way it happened,” exclaimed the president’s special counsel. “No one can say politics,” replied Nixon. But it was, of course, as Colson explained. “We look tough and hard line and North Vietnam looks like they’re coming to us. And old George McGovern looks like he has swallowed his lunch and has a very bad case of indigestion. He looks pretty feeble.” Colson went on to make the point that even if Watergate were having any effect, the announcement nicely took care of that. The timing was perfect for Colson as he wanted a final slam on McGovern. “We should not let up on this fellow for one minute,” the special counsel exclaimed. Nixon agreed, naturally, adding “Don’t let him off the ground.” Colson had spoken to pollster Lou Harris who suggested that the announcement would result in “a tremendous landslide.”⁵⁰⁶ That day Buchanan sent memos to Haldeman and Ehrlichman, adamant that they create new television attack ads against McGovern concerning Vietnam.⁵⁰⁷

Buchanan aide Ken Khachigian was also arguing for throwing down the gloves and going after McGovern hard. “We have suffered in silence long enough,” the staffer wrote in some frustration. “It’s time to come out fighting.” Khachigian complained that there was a “distinct appearance” that the reelection team was “acquiescing by our denials and no comments” to McGovern’s attacks over Vietnam. As he suggested to Haldeman, the administration needed to “go on the attack and to do it hard.” The main reason, he believed, was to squash the trilateral conspiracy between “McGovern and the left, aided and abetted by the *Post* et al,” that intended to “destroy the President.” Since the Democrats under McGovern knew that they would lose in November, they “are going out as irresponsibly as they can.” Khachigian added that his team was sitting on a “laundry list of McGovern immorality and corruption [and] all of the issues that McGovern is trying to cover-up—the welfare, defense, and high budget stuff, plus his total surrender to North Vietnam.”⁵⁰⁸

⁵⁰⁴ John S. Bowman, editor, *The Vietnam War: An Almanac* (New York: World Almanac Publications, 1985), 327.

⁵⁰⁵ Bowman, *The Vietnam War*, 330.

⁵⁰⁶ See WHT, Conversation No. 032-065, October 26, 1972, NARA.

⁵⁰⁷ Memorandum from Pat Buchanan to H.R. Haldeman, John Ehrlichman, and Charles Colson, October 26, 1972, Buchanan Papers, Box 7, NARA.

⁵⁰⁸ Memorandum from Ken Khachigian to H.R. Haldeman, through Pat Buchanan, October 26, 1972, Box 48, WHSF, Nixon Library. The Vietnam issue, though, never had any traction for the Democrats, as the administration always managed to shape its approach to the war as ending it with dignity and honor. Kissinger’s announcement of a pending peace treaty with the North Vietnamese that very day was typical of the way they managed to keep McGovern on the defensive. The talking points and speeches for the surrogates for the final days were much like

But Nixon's chief of staff worried about the attacks getting carried away. While Haldeman sent a memorandum to Colson that very day about unleashing the dogs on McGovern with a "massive attack" on "all the Vietnam related issues" in reaction to the senator's criticisms that he agreed were "the most vicious attacks on the President in history," he did not want sloppy attacks such as those that might be made by Vice President Agnew messing up the electoral bed at the last minute. As Haldeman ordered, "The Vice President should be kept completely off this subject." Nixon's chief of staff did not want White House press secretary Ron Ziegler on it either; he wanted his trench warriors, he wanted Colson's operation. As Haldeman ordered, "This is at the political level and should be [dealt] with at the political level."⁵⁰⁹

The text of a Connally speech penned by Buchanan on the subject the next day showed how they used the issue to maximum effect. The speech indicated that McGovern had promised that if elected he would "carry out an American surrender on Communist terms in Southeast Asia...; in short, two days after Hanoi had secretly accepted the essentials of the honorable United States compromise proposal of May 8 for a cease-fire and an honorable settlement—Senator McGovern was still publicly calling for a dishonorable American surrender and on terms even harsher and more humiliating for his own country than Hanoi had demanded."⁵¹⁰ Of course McGovern was not privy to the secret May 8 agreement, but that meant little to how they planned to use it as proof that their opponent had been wrong on Vietnam all along.

The dark cloud that had followed McGovern around since the Eagleton affair had not gone away. Falling in the polls, painted into a corner as a radical and an "extremist," and seemingly on the wrong side of foreign policy issues, partisan fighters such as Colson and Buchanan began to relish their opponent's demise. They especially enjoyed newspaper columns that suggested that the election campaign was in a large sense a "referendum on the major issues of the day." Indeed, the very day that the *Washington Post* reported that the FBI had found evidence linking the Watergate burglaries to a massive campaign of political espionage by the Nixon reelection effort, Colson and Buchanan were gloating about the campaign and the coverage of the Democrats' demise in the media. As the president's special counsel suggested to Buchanan, nothing could stand in their way to victory as Nixon represented the "views of the vast majority of the American people and that McGovern has simply . . . misjudged the mood of the country."⁵¹¹ By late October, McGovern pollster Pat Caddell knew it was over. Looking at the polling data, he recalled dryly, "I felt like the recreation director on the *Titanic*."⁵¹²

they had been all along; only the Nixon administration could "bring the war in Asia to an honorable end." See Buchanan draft speeches for surrogates, October 31, 1972, Buchanan Papers, Box 2, NARA.

⁵⁰⁹ Memorandum from H.R. Haldeman to Charles Colson, October 26, 1972, Haldeman Papers, Box 26, NARA.

⁵¹⁰ See memorandum from H.R. Haldeman to Charles Colson, October 27, 1972, and speech from same date, all in Buchanan, Box 5.

⁵¹¹ Memorandum from Charles Colson to Pat Buchanan, October 10, 1972, Colson Papers, Box 132, NARA. See also the *Washington Post*, October 10, 1972, A1, A14.

⁵¹² White, *The Making of the President*, 319.

CHAPTER 7

A BITTER HARVEST

This is terrible! This is awful shit. I just want to take a look at him! Is he alive? How do I know he's alive?⁵¹³

In King's Row in the Old Executive Office Building—the spot where the big boys swaggered—sat Richard Nixon and his special side-kick, Charles Colson. In the final days of the election campaign of 1972, holed up in the president's hideaway office, the pair planned in bitter prose post-election retribution. Although mere months away from political disaster, these self-styled sovereigns operated as if they ultimately wielded the sword. Sitting in easy chairs with their feet up, they plotted the slaying of enemies in the media following the election. "We're going to screw them another way," Nixon told Colson in reference to the *Washington Post*. "They don't really realize how rough I can play. I've been such a nice guy around here a lot of times . . . But when I start, I will kill them. There's no question about it."⁵¹⁴ That, of course, was the "inside" Nixon. To his own cabinet and the rest of the world, the president preferred to play the 'statesman,' a man worthy of the Oval Office. Like coveted French wine, Nixon kept his more bitter thoughts on special reserve for his inner circle.

On October 29, in sharp contrast to his acidity with Colson, the president struck a thoughtful pose just a short walk away at the EOB's Conference Room. That Sunday morning, just over a week before his last election, Nixon met with the surrogates who had served him so loyally along the campaign trail in his stead. At 11:00 am, the president buttoned his jacket and strolled in to offer a special 'thank you' and to rally the troops for the last week before Election Day. "I want to say...that I am very appreciative of what you have done," Nixon said, standing and looking around the room. "I am very proud of what you have done. I know that to go out and be heckled from time to time, or wondering why you aren't getting the play [in the press], must bother a few of you. I must say that I have had so much of it through the years it just goes off my back; it doesn't bother me anymore." While this comment was patently false, Nixon's job that morning was to squeeze the last few drops from the political lemon and rally the troops. The president told them they had "done a splendid job," and that the work by the surrogates in the campaign "when it is all written in the future, will be one of the very, very positive points that will be emphasized by those political scientists who will try to find out how it all happened."⁵¹⁵

⁵¹³ The *Washington Star*'s James Doyle expressing his frustration over his colleagues' inability to see the president at campaign appearances. See Spear, *The Presidents and the Press*, 31-32, 176, 178.

⁵¹⁴ See WHT, Conversation No. 372-26, October 25, 1972, NARA. See also, White, *The Making of the President 1972*, 255-256. If there was a "hate-list," White wrote, "first would be The *Washington Post*, second, CBS, third, the *New York Times*, fourth, the Hanoi regime, fifth the Saigon regime, sixth college campuses with McGovern down the list somewhere between tenth and twentieth." As the biographer pointed out, Nixon and the *Washington Post* were "locked like two scorpions in a bottle, determined to destroy each other." Others referred to Colson and the president's conversations on the tapes like "dirty-boy talk, like two little boys pulling wings off flies." See Lukas, *Nightmare*, 211. Nixon and Colson actually spoke a few times about putting the *Washington Post* out of business. Colson suggested that they could just not renew the publication's license. Nixon asked: "Is there a way we can do that?" Colson responded: "Yes, sir. It has to come up for renewal every three years." Nixon wondered when the renewal would come up, and Colson responded, "I don't know." The president simply stated, "I hope to Christ it comes up this year." See Kutler, *Abuse of Power*, 143-144.

⁵¹⁵ From Richard Nixon's address to his surrogates in the Cabinet Room, October 29, 1972. Please see memorandum from David C. Hoopes to The President's File, October 29, 1972, President's Office Files, Box 90, NARA.

The president of course could not imagine that Watergate would narrow the lens on these “positive points” to a place where they rate little more than a footnote in the scholarship on his presidency. But Nixon had more immediate concerns, not the work of future political scientists and historians who would see his actions not as part of a strategy to remain in the White House, but as proof of his growing isolation.⁵¹⁶ That bright and promising morning the president stressed to all in the room that they must remain steadfast and positive, that “above everything else, as you go out, be confident; not cocky.” While the president assured them he believed they would behave this way, he maintained that it was “particularly” important to do all they could in the last week of the campaign. His team remained concerned that a small turnout would help the Democrats and Nixon pressed his surrogates to “hit hard” on the word *vote*. “The most important thing to get across to all of our people is ‘Get out the vote’ . . . If you can, hit that very, very hard...this is the greatest service you can render in this last week of the campaign.”⁵¹⁷ While Nixon stayed behind in the White House, his loyal team launched its final pre-election day organizational activities for its national campaign. On October 28, the reelection effort fired up its “Get-Out-The-Vote (GOTV) Kick-Off.” The operation took place in 44 separate areas in 22 battleground states. Nixon’s dozens of surrogates visited storefront operations and telephone centers in these key areas for the final push toward Election Day.⁵¹⁸

On the Saturday before the election, Colson sat in his office in the Old Executive Office Building and thought about his fellow citizens heading to the polls on Tuesday. Never ready to call the game until the last whistle, the attorney pulled himself up to his typewriter, loosened his tie and fired off a letter to Secretary of State William P. Rogers. His thoughts were on the long postponed peace agreement with Hanoi. The chief “political” attack from the opposition Nixon’s team had always worried about concerned the war. Even though the White House knew that it owned the Vietnam issue, characterized so well in Henry Kissinger’s much publicized announcement of a pending 9-point peace treaty with the North, staff members bristled each time McGovern attacked the president in the press over Southeast Asia. Much of this was due to the Nixon and Buchanan belief that the press too often ignored the administration’s foreign policy’s successes or labeled them as politically motivated. While there is little evidence to substantiate their belief, this reactionary stance ran through the administration like blood, but like bile, it usually coagulated in the offices of Charles Colson.

That Saturday, President Nixon’s special counsel was not in a good mood, as he bristled at McGovern’s suggestion the previous evening that his boss had used the announcement of a treaty with Hanoi on October 26 for political purposes. Of course, even though the Massachusetts attorney understood that was largely true, he nonetheless worried about the charge of politicking on the Vietnam issue. Although Colson understood that his opponent was going to face “massive repudiation” at the polls in 72 hours, he wanted everyone on board for a strong 11th hour response to McGovern’s charge. As he indicated to Rogers, “As we sum it all up, looking at Tuesday, the issue to present to the American people is do we want to stand with the

⁵¹⁶ Please see Reeves, *President Nixon*; Kutler, *The Wars of Watergate*, 617; Drew, *Richard M. Nixon*, 45; Small, *The Presidency of Richard Nixon*, 310; Parmet, *Richard Nixon and His America*, 610; Wicker, *One of Us*, 652-653; and Genovese, *The Nixon Legacy*, 241.

⁵¹⁷ From Richard Nixon’s address to his surrogates in the Cabinet Room, October 29, 1972. Please see memorandum from David C. Hoopes to The President’s File, October 29, 1972, President’s Office Files, Box 90, NARA.

⁵¹⁸ Pat Buchanan’s “Critique of the 1972 Campaign” for the President, November 7, 1972, WHSF, Box 33, Nixon Library.

President for an honorable end to this bloody and divisive conflict...or do we want to take the McGovern approach of surrender and begging.”⁵¹⁹

As hard as the senator from South Dakota tried to come out swinging against the president’s record, though, his stance had failed to resonate with any length or depth in the heartland. This was certainly the case with the Vietnam War. As a campaign issue, it never really gained any traction. For most Americans, including many of the nation’s journalists, Nixon’s policy on Vietnam, while not perfect, was the best that could be made out of a bad situation, and Nixon managed to finesse the touchy issues of amnesty and the return of POWS as a question of honor in the heartland. The polls showed that a clear majority of the American people trusted that Nixon was going to end the war while achieving some measure of ‘honor.’ By 1971 and 1972, the Vietnam War was no longer the one Nixon had inherited when he assumed office in January of 1969. In the final days before the election of 1972, *Newsweek* columnist Stewart Alsop summed up the feckless McGovern campaign and his insistence that the war had made the election a contest between good and evil. The veteran journalist had taken the Democratic nominee to task on numerous occasions, including McGovern’s comparison of Nixon to Adolph Hitler for extending the Asian conflict beyond Vietnam. “Here we come back to that mystery—why Senator McGovern has been such a disastrous candidate . . . When he orates about the war, McGovern often talks as though he were running against Lyndon Johnson, when Johnson had more than half a million men in Vietnam, and draft calls and casualties were high. In fact, the central political fact about the war today is that no more young men are being drafted and sent to Vietnam.”⁵²⁰

Nixon had managed to have his way with Middle Americans on the Vietnam issue since his major speech to the nation on the war in Southeast Asia in November 3, 1969, when tens of thousands of pieces of positive mail flooded into the White House in response. In April and May 1972, Nixon addressed the nation on Vietnam by radio and television and garnered a similar response, engendering many thousands of telegrams in the days and weeks following.⁵²¹ The comments were three to one strongly supporting the president’s position on the war. “Thank God for your courage and leadership,” read some letters, while others suggested, “Your logic on Vietnam policy is unassailable”; “You’re really talking like a President”; “Your speech was great as you are”; “Applaud your strong stand and speech”; “Your speech made us proud to be Americans,” and “We are behind you 100 percent.” To Nixon’s advantage, McGovern was increasingly portrayed during the campaign as being out of touch with the mood in the nation. As Stewart Alsop pointed out to his readers, “McGovern often talks as though we were in the middle of a Hoover-style depression. In fact, we are in the middle of a boom, and most of the voters have never had it so good.”⁵²² That same afternoon, Haldeman was in a rare good mood as he understood that journalists such as Alsop were right. As he jotted in his note pad in his spacious White House office, “Think we’re in great shape.” Indeed, Haldeman believed that the popular vote would play out at about 58 percent to 42 percent for his boss, as it was “hard to

⁵¹⁹ Letter from Charles Colson to Secretary of State William P. Rogers, November 4, 1972, Colson Papers, Box 132, NARA. See also Dallek, *Partners in Power*, 427-431.

⁵²⁰ Stewart Alsop, column, *Newsweek*, November 6, 1972, 136. See also the *Washington Post*, October 6, 1972, A2 for coverage on how the Democratic nominee had slipped badly on the Vietnam issue. On June 28, 1972, Nixon announced that no new draftees would be sent to Vietnam.

⁵²¹ See memorandum from Roland L. Elliott to senior staff, May 10, 1972, Colson Papers, Box 80, NARA.

⁵²² See Stewart Alsop, column, *Newsweek*, November 6, 1972, 136. Additionally, in regard to television ads, Haldeman called it a “tough judgment call whether TV is a good idea.” But there was a need to “offset McGovern’s crowds.” See Haldeman Notes, October 17, 1972, Haldeman Papers, Box 46, NARA.

believe [it] can be bigger.” In the end, according to the chief of staff, there was “no concern” about McGovern winning a war of words over Vietnam, as “no one believes McGovern on this.”⁵²³ The strategy had all worked well for Nixon and his loyal men, as voters over 50 described Nixon as “strong, statesmanlike,” “competent” and “trustworthy.”⁵²⁴

On the evening of November 3, Colson and the president spoke by phone in the Oval Office about McGovern and the Democrats, and the pain that was about to be inflicted on their political opponents. Both men mused about the good word from Wall Street, as stocks had risen on the news that the president would remain in the White House. “I’ll say they’ve finally decided on Wall Street that you were going to be reelected,” Colson said. Nixon retorted, “Ha! Well, at least this is a good thing in a sense, you know. In that arena, a lot of those jackasses just vote on the basis of how their stocks are.” But the real matter was their opponent. The pair relished the hurt they had caused McGovern, a defeat which was evident on the senator’s face on television that night. “He’s doing very badly,” Colson said with some satisfaction. “On TV tonight he looked whipped.” With facetious concern, Nixon responded, “Hell, he’s *tired*. The *poor* devil is running around, of course he’s only 50 years of age. Christ, when I was 50, I could go like hell.” Colson added that McGovern just “doesn’t have the stuff.” The president’s faithful assistant suggested that the Democratic challenger “realizes he’s on the verge of an impending... .” Nixon finished the sentence for him with one word, “*Disaster*.” Colson naturally sounded amused, as he put it, “everything he has done has gone wrong.” To their pleasure, the pair recounted how the life had also gone out of the Democratic faithful in the field. The word from California was that “the Democrats out here are absolutely demoralized,” Colson said, repeating the news from his men in the trenches. The special counsel gloated that “there’s no sign of activity on their side.”⁵²⁵

To illustrate that point, Colson informed Nixon that the latest Harris poll predicted the president’s reelection by a margin of 61 percent to 33 percent. Nixon, seeming surprised by the notion of a landslide victory, asked, “Does [pollster Harris] think this figure’s right, Chuck?” Colson responded, “Yes, sir.” The president, though, disagreed, indicating, “I don’t really believe that. . . .” Colson reassured his boss it was true before the conversation returned to musing over their opponent’s collapse. Colson suggested with some glee that McGovern was “coming apart at the seams,” and that he looked “pretty pitiful.” The special counsel informed the president that the candidate needed to cancel some engagements earlier in the day to tape the evening’s television spot. Moreover, according to Colson, even McGovern’s handlers looked drained and done. “They had an interview with [campaign manager Frank] Mankiewicz who really looked whipped on the evening news tonight.” Nixon understood what his team had wrought on its opponents since summer. As the president expressed with obvious candor, “they’ve got to be coming apart. Good God, they’ve got to be.” The special counsel made it clear to his boss that even at the 11th hour, they would not take their foot off McGovern’s neck. “We’ll keep right on ‘em,” Colson said. “Yes, sir!”⁵²⁶

A look at the discussions between Nixon and his top advisers in the days immediately prior to the election reveals not only the petty personal politics but the low level of concern they had over what would appear to have been one of the major issues of election year: Watergate.

⁵²³ Haldeman Notes, November 6, 1972, Haldeman Papers, Box 46, NARA.

⁵²⁴ See the *Washington Post*, October 22, 1972, A1, A4.

⁵²⁵ WHT, Conversation No. 33-2, November 3, 1972, Nixon Library.

⁵²⁶ WHT, Conversation No. 33-2, November 3, 1972, Nixon Library.

Given the number of works on Watergate compared to the few that deal with the landslide election, it might appear that the scandal was the biggest story of 1972. The tapes reveal that this issue was not a major concern in the last weeks before Americans went to the polls. One of the main reasons for this was another issue that the president and his team believed they owned that year, and that was Vietnam. As Colson told Nixon, “Mr. President, [the promise of a peace accord in] Vietnam just knocked [Watergate] right off of people’s minds. [The Harris Poll indicates] that people are only thinking about one thing at a time. Right now they’re thinking about the end of the war. That’s helped the confidence in your leadership, and that’s stopped the erosion and that stopped people thinking about saboteurs.” As Nixon was well aware that the strategy to destroy George McGovern as a viable candidate had made a significant difference in this respect, he offered, “And even though they know it isn’t over, they have more confidence in me than McGovern?” Colson responded, “That’s right.” The strategist understood that the reelection team was “going into the weekend just about as strong as [they] could be.” In fact, the lack of concern about Vietnam and Watergate had been present in their reelection deliberations all along. Throughout the summer and fall, Nixon and his men were seldom worried about losing the election over these issues, but rather, losing by default to the Democrats by overexposing the president’s more “unlikable” qualities or suffering the apathy of their supporters who believed the president would win easily over an “extremist” candidate like George McGovern.⁵²⁷

The strategy hatched by the president’s loyalists had worked. And when Richard Nixon finally decided to leave the White House to meet voters before they headed to the polls on a “two-day final campaign swing” through five states, prior to landing in his home state of California, he planned on sticking to the script. “It’s rather good that I’m out tomorrow, really, because it’ll be...a way to just take the high road,” Nixon told Colson. His special counsel believed that it was good that the president was finally getting out to see the voters, telling his boss that they were bringing the campaign to an end “with you on the upswing.”⁵²⁸

In the closing days of the election with Nixon’s men firing up the troops for a huge get-out-the-vote push, the Democrats were singing the same tune. Indeed, some desperate Democrats hoped for a miracle. As one of McGovern’s staffers suggested, “The polls have never measured motivation and commitment. Our people will wait four hours in a blizzard to vote for George McGovern.” As Steven Roberts dryly observed in the *New York Times*, “The Democrats are praying for a blizzard.”⁵²⁹ The blizzard never came.

On the day before the election, columnists Rowland Evans and Bob Novak shook their collective heads in amazement over how Nixon and his men had managed to pull it off, how they had stuck to a script that the scribes knew was hatched almost two years earlier. The plans “for Mr. Nixon to stay in the White House all year and campaign hardly at all...astonishes even the White House inner circle” in that the president had “followed the plans to the letter.” Moreover, that the president refused to lose his cool with hecklers at his final campaign stops was remarkable for the old political warrior. “Nobody knows whether such self-control would have been possible if a Democratic candidate more viable than McGovern had made a real race. But the fact remains that the last of Richard Nixon’s five campaigns for national office has ended up as his quietest, his dullest, and, undoubtedly, his best.”⁵³⁰ For the feckless campaign of his opponent, George McGovern, the end of the trail came on a sour note. While shaking hands

⁵²⁷ WHT, Conversation No. 33-2, November 3, 1972, Nixon Library.

⁵²⁸ WHT, Conversation No. 33-2, November 3, 1972, Nixon Library. See also Nixon, *RN*, 713.

⁵²⁹ The *New York Times*, November 6, 1972, 48.

⁵³⁰ The *Washington Post*, November 6, 1972, A23.

along the fence line at the airport in Battle Creek, Michigan, in the campaign's final days, a Nixon supporter dogged him, chatting "Four more years, four more years." As McGovern worked his way closer, pressing the flesh, the heckler shouted, "We'll beat you so bad you'll wish you never left South Dakota." The Democratic candidate for president replied, "I've got a secret for you—kiss my ass."⁵³¹

The night before the president left Washington, Tricia Nixon walked into the Lincoln Sitting Room to talk to her father. The small Victorian-styled sitting room located on the second floor of the White House was also the president's favorite, a place he sat most nights in his preferred chocolate brown easy chair and matching footstool, writing and listening to music. The chair was so well-loved, the president often had the piece of furniture packed up and flown with him so he could enjoy it on trips around the country. Looking up from his long yellow legal pad covered with his hand-written scrawl, Nixon welcomed the visit from his youngest daughter. Tricia sat down beside her father and said, "I want this week to be the real last hurrah."⁵³² The next morning, the president of the United States finally left the White House to meet his fellow Americans on the campaign trail—one last time.

Richard Nixon attended the final rally as a candidate in his long political career the night before the election in Ontario, California, just a few short miles from where he ran his very first campaign rally twenty six years earlier. Looking out over the crowd in Ontario, Nixon told the assemblage that where once the nation was divided by regions, including urban and rural, that had all changed, as "wherever you go across America, this nation is getting together."⁵³³ On November 7, Nixon cast his own vote for the presidency at a polling station in San Clemente, California. While a frustrated press secretary Ron Ziegler yelled, "Stop that! Stop that! No pictures!", photographers rapidly snapped their shutters capturing both the vote and the commander-in-chief dropping the ballot to the floor before awkwardly fishing it out from under the voting machine.⁵³⁴ The president later flew back across the country to Washington to await the night's returns. Following an enthusiastic greeting by his staff on the White House steps, Nixon joined his family for dinner in the residence before heading to his favorite chair in the Lincoln Sitting Room to wait and think while he listened to Richard Rodgers' "Victory at Sea." The president was adamant that he "would not insult anyone's intelligence by rehashing the issues and making a last-minute plea for votes." As he indicated in his memoirs, the election was "probably the clearest choice between the candidates for President ever presented to the American people in the twentieth century."⁵³⁵ With the music's volume turned loud, Nixon reached for the phone at his side, wanting to speak to his loyal chief of staff about the historic night to come. Haldeman "could hear his 'Victory at Sea' record playing loudly in the background."⁵³⁶

As the returns began coming in from across the country, it was apparent that the night would bring an overwhelming victory to Richard Nixon. Not surprisingly, the president was soon

⁵³¹ See the *Washington Post*, November 3, 1972, A6.

⁵³² Nixon, *RN*, 713. Nixon loved the sitting room so much that he had it replicated to scale in his presidential library in Yorba Linda, California. In the corner of the room sits the actual brown chair and matching footrest, a gift from Pat in 1961, which the president brought with him into the White House.

⁵³³ Nixon, *RN*, 713.

⁵³⁴ Ziegler is quoted in, Reeves, *President Nixon, Alone in the White House*, 541.

⁵³⁵ Nixon, *RN*, 714, 715.

⁵³⁶ Haldeman, *Haldeman Diaries*, 530-531.

on the phone to his favorite aide, Chuck Colson. “Well, congratulations, Mr. President,” the elated special counsel gushed. “It looks to me like a very big landslide. Just about. I think we’re going to make honest men out of the pollsters . . . They’ve called us winning it. In fact, NBC has called us winning it.” Colson was pleased when the network not only called the election at 7:05 pm, but with an overwhelming victory with 60 percent going to the president. “They [the pollsters] think it’s going to be right around 60. It could go over 60 [percent] . . . One hell of a landslide, Mr. President.” The only blemish at that point for Nixon and Colson was the possible loss of Massachusetts and the prospect of again losing Congress to the Democrats. Nixon appeared to care little about Colson’s home state, but not winning the Hill had Nixon feeling sour on election night, especially concerning the way the media would characterize his landslide. As the president suggested to Colson, “I suppose that’s the way that they’ll piss on the damn thing.”⁵³⁷

Ridicule of the nightly television coverage replaced the president’s bitterness minutes later when he got on the phone once again with Haldeman. The pair was incredulous about CBS predicting an even larger “total landslide” of 67 percent to 32 percent, with only two percent of the returns in. Nixon laughed and his chief of staff called it “most ridiculous.” But when ABC had the president at 55 percent, Nixon knew that it was “too far” off the mark. The problem with the coverage, according to Haldeman, was that they were “projecting too early.” Nixon was not impressed and his chief of staff called the televised events a “shameful operation.”⁵³⁸ At 11:30 pm, a gracious in defeat George McGovern sent a telegram to the president. “Congratulations on your victory,” it stated. “I hope that in the next four years you will lead us to a time of peace abroad and justice at home. You have my full support in such efforts with the best wishes from Eleanor and me to you and your gracious wife Pat.”⁵³⁹ The president’s daughters were not impressed. They thought that McGovern’s comments were “cold and arch.”⁵⁴⁰

While Nixon’s memoirs are silent about McGovern’s statement, other than that it was “carefully worded,” the president revealed his true feelings to his national security adviser in the early hours of November 8.⁵⁴¹ After Nixon arranged to meet Colson and Haldeman over in his office in EOB for an early morning rendezvous, he took a 1:15 am phone call at the White House from Henry Kissinger. “It’s an extraordinary tribute,” a gloating national security adviser said. For Nixon it was an opportunity to dump on his vanquished opponent. “You know this, this fellow [George McGovern] to the last was a prick. Did you see his concession statement?” While Nixon admitted that the senator “was very gracious at the beginning,” he could not stomach speechwriter Ray Price’s suggestion for a suitable genial response. Nixon scoffed, mocking Price’s words: “‘*I look forward to working with you and your supporters for peace in the years ahead,*’ and I just said, ‘hell, no, I’m not going to send him that sort of a wire.’” Kissinger agreed: “Absolutely.” Nixon had even argued with Haldeman about his proposal to be gracious. “But I said, ‘Ray just doesn’t have the right sense of this sort of thing.’” Kissinger, naturally, agreed with everything the president uttered during the short phone call. “No, [McGovern] was ungenerous, he was petulant, he was unworthy,” he told Nixon who agreed with a strong “*Right*” on each point. In the end, Nixon informed Kissinger that he just *pretended* to be gracious:

⁵³⁷ WHT, Conversation No. 33-47, November 7, 1972, Nixon Library.

⁵³⁸ WHT, Conversation No. 33-48, November 7, 1972, Nixon Library. See also Nixon, *RN*, 715-717.

⁵³⁹ See telegram from George McGovern to the President, November 7, 1972, WHSF, Contested Files, Box 40, Nixon Library.

⁵⁴⁰ Nixon, *RN*, 716.

⁵⁴¹ Nixon, *RN*, 716.

“Because you probably know, I responded in a [laughs] very decent way to him.” Kissinger, ever unctuous, replied, “Well, I thought you were a great statesman.” Nixon admitted that he was incapable of any other words of kindness for McGovern, as his thoughts were on his disappointment over the tallies in Congress. “That’s as far as I could go . . . I’m not going to say much to him . . . Anyway, it was a good day. We had a terrible time in the damn Senate. We’re going to end up with probably 44, but, it isn’t worth a damn anyway.” Kissinger, however, soothed: “It’s a tremendous personal triumph, Mr. President.” Nixon thought about what it meant, his bitterness showing over how he failed to capture Congress, a sullenness that was mixed with a sour pleasure for destroying McGovern at the voting booth. Nixon pouted that “all these left-wing columnists can do now is to piss on [his victory by] not winning the Senate and the House.” But the president believed he had achieved a revenge of sorts on the media, believing without evidence that journalists had supported McGovern. Nixon suggested that members of the media knew that his loyal men “came up to bat against *their* candidate and beat the hell out of him.”⁵⁴²

One issue that the national security adviser was accurate about was his suggestion that Vietnam never was a negative for the president as Nixon had made the war his “issue without fear or weakness.” Namely, that they had managed the announcement, the progress, and the timing of a peace deal with North Vietnam, navigating around the touchy issues of POWs and post-withdrawal conditions for the South. Kissinger also pressed the button that he knew the president would respond to. “Year after year the media were harassing you, all the intellectuals were against you, and you’ve come out and have the greatest victory, I’m sure in terms of margin that anyone has had.” Nixon responded quickly, “That’s right. That’s right.” The national security adviser reminded his boss again that it was “a tremendous triumph.” Eager to get over to the EOB to carouse with Colson and Haldeman, however, the president ended the phone call with an utterance that inadvertently foreshadowed what was to be a bizarre day after the election. “Well, anyway, Henry; have a good night’s sleep,” Nixon said. “Give ‘em *hell* tomorrow.”⁵⁴³ Give them “hell” was exactly what they did. But this time, Nixon’s guns were pointed inward in the direction of his own staff and cabinet.

Following his call with Kissinger, Nixon left the White House for the short stroll over to the EOB, arriving there around 1:30 am to meet with his real partners in power, Colson and Haldeman. About 2:30 in the morning, about 15 minutes after Sargent Shriver sent in a teletype message offering “sincere congratulations” to the administration on its victory, Nixon and his favorite boys ordered up some bacon and eggs from the White House Mess and took in the victory in style. Feeling no more gracious than his boss in victory, Colson fired off a memo to Bruce Kehrli suggesting that the president should not speak to Canadian Prime Minister Pierre Trudeau.⁵⁴⁴ Colson’s only annoyance that morning was that the president did not carry his home state of Massachusetts. He chalked it up, however, to the state having “a disproportionate share of kooks.”⁵⁴⁵

⁵⁴² WHT, Conversation No. 33-60, November 8, 1972, Nixon Library.

⁵⁴³ WHT, Conversation No. 33-60, November 8, 1972, Nixon Library.

⁵⁴⁴ Memorandum from Charles Colson to Bruce Kehrli, November 7, 1972, Colson Papers, Box 132, NARA. See also Shriver’s congratulatory teletype sent to the White House at 2:12 am, November 8, 1972, found in WHSF, Contested Files, Box 40, Nixon Library. Nixon and Trudeau always enjoyed a frosty relationship, and no one in the inner circle was immune to this enmity.

⁵⁴⁵ See Colson’s recollections in the *Washington Post*, December 5, 1972, B1, B3. See also Haldeman, *Haldeman Diaries*, 531. The White House chief of staff did not arrive home until 4:00 am. Once at home, he still took the time to write in his nightly diary.

For once, even Richard Nixon would have enjoyed reading the morning edition of the *Washington Post*. As David Broder wrote, the president's opponent George McGovern was "destined to go into the history books as one of the all-time losers—ranking with Barry Goldwater, Alf Landon, Herbert Hoover and Horace Greeley." The president, Broder wrote, had received from the voters the goal he had most coveted, and that was "'a new majority.' He toppled traditional Democratic strongholds in the North and made the Solid South solidly Republican." Nixon's last campaign victory had come twenty-six years after his first election night victory over Democrat Jerry Voorhis, twenty years after becoming vice president to Dwight Eisenhower, and ten years to the day from his infamous post-election defeat in the California gubernatorial race, where he told journalists that they would "not have Richard Nixon to kick around anymore."⁵⁴⁶

Indeed Richard Nixon had achieved a massive electoral victory, beating McGovern 60.7 to 37.5 percent. The margin of victory was a whopping 23.2 percentage points, second only to FDR's 24.3 percentage points over Alf Landon in 1936. Lyndon Johnson's 1964 win over Republican Barry Goldwater sits at third with a 22.6 percent margin of victory. Nixon's 60.7 percent of the popular vote was also the third highest in American history, narrowly trailing Johnson's 61.1 percent in 1964 and FDR's 60.8 percent in 1936. The Nixon landslide, though, did something that his Democratic predecessor, Lyndon Johnson, was unable to do, and that was to carry 49 out of 50 states. George McGovern had even failed to carry his home state of South Dakota.⁵⁴⁷

At 10:59 am on November 8 with the morning sun almost directly over the White House, Nixon had finally responded to McGovern's congratulatory message, one penned by Pat Buchanan. It read: "Mrs. Nixon and I deeply appreciated your election night wire. You and Mrs. McGovern have our very best wishes for a well-deserved rest [sic] after what I know must have been a very strenuous and tiring campaign."⁵⁴⁸ That morning as the president's men slapped each other on the back and wrote each other congratulatory memos on White House letterhead, things were brewing inside the Oval Office. While Dwight Chapin wrote to Strachan, thanking him "for helping with one of the most magnificent outcomes in political history," celebrations were to be short-lived as a new post-election political reality was settling in.⁵⁴⁹

As the events of that day transpired, staffers, and those in the Cabinet whom the president had just days earlier beseeched to bring him over the top, were in for a rude surprise. In the White House, the president and Haldeman met to make the final arrangements for the immediate resignation of staff and cabinet members. Sitting by the president's side, his yellow legal pad perched on the edge of the desk in the Oval Office, Haldeman took notes as he and the president spoke of an immediate transition. Those closest to the president would be given a chance to "say goodbye and start all over." After submitting their resignations, the "members of the first team" would be asked if they wanted to return as they were the ones that "made possible what happened."⁵⁵⁰

⁵⁴⁶ See the *Washington Post*, November 8, 1972, A1, A11.

⁵⁴⁷ Please see George Brown Tindall and David E. Shi, *America: A Narrative History*, Fourth Edition (New York: W.W. Norton and Company, 1996), 1474, and White, *The Making of the President*, 1972, 342, 348-349.

⁵⁴⁸ Please see message in WHSF, Contested Files, Box 40, Nixon Library. See also White, *The Making of the President*, 1972, 13.

⁵⁴⁹ Letter from Dwight Chapin to Gordon Strachan, November 8, 1972, WHSF, Contested Files, Box 41, Nixon Library.

⁵⁵⁰ Haldeman notes, November 8, 1972, Haldeman Papers, Box 46, NARA.

As Haldeman suggested, it was all a part of some “very sweeping plans,” a house cleaning of sorts. Everyone on staff would submit their resignations with the caveat that they could be asked to return, but on entirely different terms. As Haldeman enunciated to the president, “Anybody who stays there’s got to be a very tough discussion with, first, about the terms under which he stays, which have to be radically different from the terms under which he came.” As the White House tapes reveal, Haldeman was blunt: “If he buys that and wants to stay that’s fine.” For anyone else, it would be a bit different. The president wanted to know how it would physically play out. “Christ . . . what are you—what do you want me to say to the staff? Do I say I’d like their resignations?” Nixon asked, deciding on how they were going to deliver the news to those who had just brought in the second widest margin of victory in the history of the Republic. “No, sir,” replied Haldeman. The president suggested that he could “just thank them for their work and so forth and so on and make it very brief and then get the hell out.” Haldeman agreed: “Absolutely, and say you know *I’m* covering that...” Nixon continued on firming up the script: “I want Bob to talk to you a bit about it’ . . . then you’ll take them. Now, and then you’ll make that meeting and be in to the Cabinet meeting by 11:00 [am]?” Haldeman responded that the talk with his loyal staff would not take long: “Yeah. It’s just going to take a couple of minutes.” Nixon knew what he wanted to do, but did not have the stomach to do the dirty work. “We really need that Cabinet meeting, right?” he asked Haldeman. “Well, whatever you want. I don’t know whether you want me there or not,” replied the chief of staff. Nixon wondered who they would get to ask the cabinet for their resignations, clearly not wanting to be in the room when that took place. Haldeman originally suggested that Secretary of State William P. Rogers would be the lucky one, while personally performing the “wrap-up set.” Haldeman stressed that he did not wish to be in the room when the president was thanking them. “I kind of think I should not be there when you’re in.” Nixon agreed with a, “Yeah, that’s fine.” Haldeman suggested that the president “should talk to them alone and then let me go in when you come out.” Nixon believed that would work but he did not want his chief domestic adviser to be there. “But . . . nobody else. I wouldn’t take Ehrlichman in, for example.” Haldeman agreed, and indicated that the message would be quite simple. The chief of staff thought the best would be to “just say, ‘You’ve done a great job,’” before lowering the boom. “Right. Right,” Nixon responded. Haldeman then explained the rationale to use for the cabinet. “I know some of you will be leaving, some of you will be moving to different kinds of jobs, and some of you will be staying where you are. Whatever it is you’re doing it’s been great.” Nixon suggested that the line should *sound* like they were “appreciated,” or as he put it, “We want to work it out in a way that will be in the best interests of *everybody* concerned.”⁵⁵¹

That morning the White House staff gathered in the opulent Roosevelt Room for what should have been a well-deserved celebration following a hard-fought election victory. With McGovern vanquished, it was a moment to thank those who had put their lives on hold to ensure the president’s return to the Oval Office. Before the ink was dry on their “certificate of achievements,” however, the 37th president of the United States appeared and told them there were “no sacred cows. . . After the Eisenhower midterm victory we didn’t change things enough.” Nixon informed his staff that there would be significant changes. “We can’t climb to the top and look down into the embers, we’ve got to still shoot some sparks, vitality, and strength, and that we get some of that from new people both in the Cabinet and here in the

⁵⁵¹ See WHT, Conversation No. 813-20, November 8, 1972, Nixon Library.

staff.”⁵⁵² Nixon then thanked them and slipped out, on his way to talk to the Cabinet. He left Haldeman to take care of the dirty details. “He then left the room and turned the floor over to me,” Haldeman wrote in his memoir. “I stood up, and in chilling tones that actor Robert Vaughn might envy told the numbstruck staff members that each and every one of them must have his resignation on my desk by nightfall. Period.”⁵⁵³

The president then met with his cabinet. When he left, Haldeman, as he had done with the White House staff, went in and asked them all to submit their resignations.⁵⁵⁴ Among those who submitted resignation letters to the president that day was the very loyal Patrick J. Buchanan. His letter read simply, “Please accept my resignation from the White House staff to be made effective at your convenience and pleasure.”⁵⁵⁵ There was nothing for which to apologize. As Haldeman rationally and coolly pointed out in his memoirs, “We did it in a ruthless fashion,” knowing that it would anger “many of our own people who had served us loyally and honorably.” Haldeman believed that “ruthlessness was the only attitude that would work” in their efforts to create a situation where they could control the entire government from the Oval Office.⁵⁵⁶

Much of this post-election house cleaning can be easily traced back to earlier in the year. In his memoir, Haldeman recalled that the president’s intention was that the turnover extend down from the executive branch all the way through to the “lower levels where the government is really run.” The president told Haldeman that they had to “do it fast because” after the election as “after the first of the year it’s too late. You have got to do it right after the election. You’ve got one week, and that’s the time to get all those resignations in and say, ‘look, you’re out, you’re out, you’re finished, you’re done, done, finished.’ Knock them the hell out of there.”⁵⁵⁷ The president also made his vision plain to Haldeman in a memo on April 24, where he indicated the type of individual he wanted to see in his administration’s second term. What Nixon wanted was a governing structure run directly out of the White House by young loyal men guided by a tight inner circle around the president. This inner circle would serve as a *de facto* cabinet. Nixon described the new order in the memorandum: “For restaffing, we should start on the basis of bringing in people with total loyalty. Youth should be emphasized with men in their 30s and 40s, and we should look for people with complete selflessness who don’t need to be babied...The point here will be to develop the building of a new establishment.”⁵⁵⁸

Haldeman agreed with this vision. In his diaries, he made several intimations that it was *he* who was pushing for the changes and a stronger control—a super cabinet concentrated out of the Oval Office. “Pushing again on project of building *our* establishment in press, business, education, etc. Long general talk about ’72 plans and after. Agrees with *my* idea that we should shoot generally for replacing all key people by mid ’73 and then really charge ahead to accomplish something during first half of second term, our potentially most productive

⁵⁵² See Haldeman, *Haldeman Diaries*, 530-533.

⁵⁵³ Haldeman, *Ends of Power*, 167. See also the files in WHSF, Box 33, Nixon Library, and Ehrlichman, *Witness to Power*, 332.

⁵⁵⁴ Haldeman, *Haldeman Diaries*, 530-533.

⁵⁵⁵ Please see a copy of this letter dated November 8, 1972, found in Pat Buchanan files, Buchanan Papers, Box 2, NARA.

⁵⁵⁶ Haldeman, *Ends of Power*, 167. See also the files in WHSF, Box 33, Nixon Library, and Ehrlichman, *Witness to Power*, 332.

⁵⁵⁷ Haldeman, *Ends of Power*, 171.

⁵⁵⁸ Please see Nixon Action Memo, April 24, 1972, Haldeman Papers, Box 112, NARA.

period.”⁵⁵⁹ Such a reference is indicative of the degree that Nixon’s closest men shaped the politics around the White House. The transformation’s collateral damage included an inglorious end for long-serving Nixon ally Herb Klein. By June 1973, he was gone, after faithfully serving the politician from Yorba Linda for 25 years. As Nixon suggested to Haldeman, “He just doesn’t have his head screwed on. You know what I mean. He just opens it up and sits there with egg on his face. He’s just not our guy at all, is he?”⁵⁶⁰

Theodore White referred to the move as “surgery on the government of the United States.” It was a streamlining of the Executive Branch, with departments run or controlled by White House staff—a “super-cabinet” controlled by the president and a small but intensely loyal inner circle. As White had phrased it, the political creature would be a “White House policy center” that the president alone would direct.⁵⁶¹ Indeed that plan was in many ways a continuation of a development that really began in 1969 with Nixon’s progressive move towards the creation of an administrative presidency. Boiled down to its essence, the moves represented the naked consolidation of power within the White House. It is clear that in the days immediately following the election victory, Nixon and his closest advisers were not worrying about Watergate—they were planning for the future, an even more strident second term where the White House could reshape the Republican Party, moving ahead with confidence, never giving a thought to the unexpected testimony of Alexander Butterfield and the yet to exist Ervin Committee. Indeed such stridency would have been surprising if Watergate had ever been seen then for what it was to become. But it is clear from the historical record that the president and his loyalists were not inordinately concerned about the situation, considering Watergate to be just another political problem—a media creation that they could manage or out maneuver as they had with other obstacles over the past three years in office. Even Nixonian “enemies” such as the *Washington Post* knew that the scandal had not really touched the president and appeared to have little traction. As journalist George Lardner reported from the campaign trail in Florida just a month before the election, “the Watergate Scandal is a ho-hum for most of the people. Politics as usual, they say.” Reporter Haynes Johnson agreed. “Indeed, the Watergate case shows just how cynically voters view the issue of political corruption. The almost universal attitude is that these kinds of things are going to occur in either party, and that no administration is free from scandals.”⁵⁶²

Many Americans did not seem to care about the scandal, and for Nixon, it was chalked up as just another fight in the media, like the controversy concerning the antitrust suit against the International Telephone and Telegraph Corporation (ITT) and its questionable contributions to the Republican National Convention.⁵⁶³ Indeed, Colson and the president had spoken about Watergate in just these terms, believing that the break-in could not prevent them from winning the election. In June 1972, Colson had suggested to his boss that Watergate should not affect the team’s morale as it was not going to make a difference in the election. The president agreed that it would eventually amount to little:

Nixon: Oh sure, and as I said, my goodness . . .

⁵⁵⁹ Haldeman, *Haldeman Diaries*, 193.

⁵⁶⁰ Quoted in Spear, *The Presidents and the Press*, 102.

⁵⁶¹ White, *Breach of Faith*, 222.

⁵⁶² See the *Washington Post*, October 5, 1972, A1.

⁵⁶³ In 1971, the U.S. Justice Department settled an antitrust suit against International Telephone and Telegraph Corporation (ITT) on what was considered to be favorable terms for the giant company not long after it had pledged a \$400,000 campaign contribution for the Republican National Convention.

Colson: We won't let this one bug us.

Nixon: Dumbest thing. My God, there are going to be all sorts of things in the campaign. We can't let this (unintelligible) worlds coming to an end. . . This is a development. Nothing loses an election. Nothing changes it that much . . . Sure . . . It washes away (unintelligible). And you look at this damn thing now and it's gonna be forgotten after awhile.

Colson: This will be forgotten and I hope a lot faster than ITT.

Nixon: Oh *sure*, you know who the hell is going to keep it alive? We're gonna have a court case and indeed, the difficulty we'll have ahead, we have got to have lawyers smart enough to have our people delay (unintelligible) avoiding depositions, of course.⁵⁶⁴

Unconcerned that Watergate would take him under, Richard Nixon and his inner circle planned for some real action. The day after the election in the afternoon, Nixon, Colson, and Robert Finch held a powwow in the EOB. On the table was the transformation of the future of American politics through the reshaping of the Republican Party. As with other issues of interest to the president, Colson was always the goad. That afternoon, the special counsel was stroking the president's ego, pointing out that Nixon had captured the "biggest majority of all time." The "fantastic numbers," according to Colson meant, "anyway we slice it, anyway the numbers come out, it is the biggest personal victory of any President in American history." The president too was fired up that afternoon with Colson in the room. "First of all, it's the biggest majority. And it's a bigger percentage flip than Johnson's percentage flip," Nixon said, his voice excited. "Do you understand? Do you know what I mean?" Colson understood, encouraging the president in his desire to break the party apart and remake it on their terms. "What we've got to really do is go over that shit now to the extent possible, I want to know whether it's shapeable . . . Chuck, I've got to tear that son of a bitch apart. Do you agree or not? Would it get any reception?" Colson wholeheartedly agreed. "You should do it right away. Immediately, Mr. President. Your great opportunity is to convert an enormous personal triumph into institutional change."⁵⁶⁵

To Nixon it was clear that much of this thrust was wrapped up in his long and combative political career. "Well, I want these bastards to know it's a personal triumph." Colson, naturally, goaded the president on, knowing what he liked to hear: "The other thing, Mr. President, in the middle of the country, what I think you can establish—first of all, what you're doing in history, *really*, of the *country*. And *you* are part of that history, will be to really throw it into the [Northern] Dems that encompasses Middle America, and *destroys* the old Eastern Establishment." Nixon responded with an optimistic musing. "I wonder—Colson, *you're destroying their value system*. I wonder if there's any way we can really get a new name for the Republican Party. I don't expect we can do that." The special counsel reminded him of his new massive mandate. "You have a new constituency, a brand new constituency. You have an opportunity to do what Roosevelt did with his election in '32 and what you'll have to do is work with the issues. You've got an opportunity to really make a major change." The president liked what he heard and was looking for ways to shake up the party apparatus. "The organization is, you know, that's exactly the point, isn't it? That's exactly the point. The thing is, Bob [Finch], in your case, *Goddamn* it! I just, who is going to run it [the Republican Congressional Campaign Committee]. No, we'll talk about that later. Can I ask you to think about [Bob] Wilson? Can we get Wilson now to resign or should we just get him the *hell* kicked out of that job? I just can't stand him anymore, can't stand it. I know he's talking about candidates. I think anyone can pick

⁵⁶⁴ WHT, Conversation No. 342-027, June 20, 1972, NARA.

⁵⁶⁵ See WHT, Conversation No. 388-8B, November 8, 1972, Nixon Library.

them, a chimpanzee, anybody.”⁵⁶⁶ Finch agreed that the president should strike while he had the power. “Well, your power is so great now, and the Party is so far down, that if it’s ever going to happen . . . this is . . . the time to do it, and whether you change your mind, or, but certainly you have to break up this terrible division between the [Republican Party’s] Senate and the House Campaign [Committees]. That’s what we’re thinking. That’s what we’re doing.”⁵⁶⁷ The president knew that he had been given a clear mandate, and with the encouragement of men like Haldeman and Colson, he was planning to transform this mandate into a new form of government by hitting the ground running in the first days of 1973.

To some observers, there was much to fear from such a result. As Garry Wills wrote just two days before the election, there were those who dreaded the prospect of Nixon winning another election as “the Supreme Court will be castrated, and *The New York Times* will be a single mimeographed page.” Sargent Shriver suggested that reelection would “unleash” Nixon. As Wills noted, a Nixon victory “will give him time and clout to stake out permanent ownership of the ‘Middle America’ he has practically invented for electoral purposes.”⁵⁶⁸ But therein lay the problem for the man from Whittier. Nixon was never able to turn off the internal political animal. As Historian Michael A. Genovese has suggested, what Nixon was preparing to do with his second term was consistent with his political nature. “Nixon saw everything as politics—as the law of the jungle, as a tough, competitive world where you have to get them before they get you.” Nixon, wrote the scholar, “was unable to make the important distinction between *politics* and *governance*.”⁵⁶⁹

With the election behind him, Richard Nixon looked ahead to the New Year and his second inauguration as president of the United States. First, the president planned to enjoy some rest and the holidays with his wife Pat, daughters Tricia and Julie, and Julie’s husband David Eisenhower. Eight thousand miles away, the Air Force, on Nixon’s orders, had launched a second round of ‘Christmas bombing’ over North Vietnam, bringing the election year of 1972 to a fiery conclusion. Other bombs were about to detonate early in the New Year, but these were going to fall much closer to home: on the White House, the president, and his loyal inner circle. Given Nixon’s immense victory at the polls, it is difficult to discern exactly what the president really expected in the months and years ahead. While Nixon’s former assistant Monica Crowley wrote that the president “was not an optimist,” it is also inaccurate to describe him as a pessimist.⁵⁷⁰ The politician from California always appeared to be moved by a complex if contradictory inner dialogue. For all of the varied emotions that the president certainly must have felt in the immediate wake of his landslide election victory, clarity was not among them. “I am at a loss to explain the melancholy that settled over me on that victorious night,” Nixon wrote in his memoir concerning the electoral triumph. “To some extent the marring effects of Watergate may have played a part...and to a greater extent the fact that we had not yet been able to end the war in Vietnam. Or perhaps it was because this would be my last campaign. Whatever the reasons, I allowed myself only a few minutes to reflect on the past. I was confident that a new era was about to begin, and I was eager to begin it.”⁵⁷¹

⁵⁶⁶ See WHT, Conversation No. 388-8B, November 8, 1972, Nixon Library.

⁵⁶⁷ See WHT, Conversation No. 388-8C, November 8, 1972, Nixon Library.

⁵⁶⁸ See the piece by Garry Wills in the *New York Times*, November 5, 1972, 37.

⁵⁶⁹ Michael A. Genovese, *The Nixon Legacy: Power and Politics in Turbulent Times* (Westport: Greenwood Press, 1990), 242.

⁵⁷⁰ Crowley, *Nixon in Winter*, 341.

⁵⁷¹ Nixon, *RN*, 717.

Under the U.S. Constitution, Nixon's victory had earned him four more years in the White House and an opportunity to create his "new era" in the nation's political story. Indeed at that point in time, there was little in American history to challenge the constitutional certainty of Richard Nixon's second term in office. Only President Andrew Johnson in 1868 had suffered the indignity of impeachment by the House of Representatives, a legislative tribulation that did not survive subsequent trial in the Senate. In November 1972, following one of the most lopsided victories in the nation's electoral history, few could have predicted the emergence of a constitutional crisis the likes of which had not occurred in 104 years. Outside the unlikely prospect of his actual death in office, Richard Milhous Nixon was a sure bet to be at the nation's helm when it celebrated its bi-centennial just three and a half years away. For some life-long politicians, though, there were some fates worse than death.

CHAPTER 8

“A MANDATE FOR REALISM.”

We shall answer to God, to history, and to our conscience for the way in which we use these years.⁵⁷²

On April 18 1975, Richard Nixon walked to the middle of a stage framed in American flags and star-spangled bunting. Under a warm mid-day sun, Old Glory danced lightly in the gentle southern breeze. The setting was picture perfect; indeed, it was much like the one he had dreamt about since first capturing the presidency in 1968. The occasion was the kick-off for the official bicentennial events in Boston, and the president arrived on Air Force One that morning to light the third lantern at the city's famous Old North Church, marking America's third century. The following day before a huge crowd, President Nixon delivered one of the strongest speeches of his political career to commemorate the 200th anniversary of the Battles of Lexington and Concord. In the weeks prior, the president and William Safire had met in the mornings in the Lincoln Sitting Room on the second floor of the White House in preparation for the address. The speechwriter sat, notepad in his lap, a cigarette perched in the corner of his mouth, and listened while the president paced and intertwined his personal story with the nation's history: his sainted Quaker mother, the battles he fought to survive, from Alger Hiss to the media that tried but failed to take him down. In the end, the second son of Frank and Hannah Nixon had bested his enemies, and the American people had made it all possible. President Nixon paused and gazed out the window in the direction of the Washington Monument for a brief moment, thinking about his great-grandfather, George Nixon III, who gave his life for his country at Gettysburg. "You know, Bill, '76 is gonna be a hell of a good year. Pat and the girls deserve it," Nixon said, turning to face his scribe. "Yeah, umm, we've all been through shi—through the valley, but we fought the good fight and climbed up the other side. Right, Bill, right? . . . Bill, where. . . are you—where did you . . . Safire?"

Sometimes when one wakes the real nightmare begins, a quiet but horrifying lucidity that grants no quarter. Even though Richard Nixon had recaptured the presidency with the second greatest margin between victors and vanquished in American history, few could have predicted that his second term as president of the United States would take its first breaths screaming and flailing for purchase. In practical terms, it was stillborn. The Watergate scandal would bring Nixon's presidency to its knees; the drama surrounding the hearings in Congress that supplanted daytime soaps had little to compare with in television history. As the first commander-in-chief since the birth of the Republic to be forced from office, Nixon, along with many of his loyal aides, was to face history's harsh judgment much sooner than anyone could have imagined. As the long and painful months of 1973 turned into 1974, many of the men who had fought the political battles with Nixon over the years and emerged victorious found themselves descending into a swamp teaming with indictments and prosecutors, where all the good presidential lawyers themselves needed lawyers. On Nixon's last day in elected office, the crowd outside the White House gates yelled, "Jail to the Chief."⁵⁷³ With Watergate, careers were ruined, fines and jail sentences were meted out, and the 37th president of the United States, not unlike a doomed

⁵⁷² From President Nixon's *Second Inaugural Address*, January 20, 1973, Public Papers of the President, Nixon Library.

⁵⁷³ Small, *The Presidency of Richard Nixon*, 296.

buccaneer on a ship brimming with pirates, was forced to walk the plank to his helicopter and into political obscurity.

Richard Nixon's massive election victory in 1972, though, was not the result of dark political doings. It is a point made well by historian Melvin Small. "By 1972, even reporters and columnists who worked for [the *Washington Post* and the *New York Times*] had come to evaluate Nixon's presidency somewhat favorably. After all, one cannot attribute his landslide victory in the 1972 election entirely to dirty tricks, smoke and mirrors, and George McGovern's inept campaign." As Small suggested, "Most Americans approved of his foreign policies including what then appeared to be a daring opening to China, the normalization of relations with the Soviet Union, and bringing most of their boys home from Vietnam with 'peace at hand.'"⁵⁷⁴

But there was much more. Nixon's team had built upon these strengths by creating the ideal image of the president in the White House while capitalizing upon the weaknesses of his opponent, thereby creating the most imperfect one of George McGovern. Following the renewed chaos of 1970, the political team projected Nixon as the calm, rational statesman who would keep the nation safe and who understood those in the American heartland, while McGovern was the leftist, communist, pinko, extremist, who palled around with the Hollywood elitist chic set.

Nixon's supporters might have not have 'loved' Nixon as John Kennedy's followers adored him, but they learned to respect what they *believed* the man from Whittier represented. In many important ways, Nixon and his team had learned to meet Americans where they were, moving to represent the issues they believed the majority of citizens wanted represented. As the famous television personage and symbol of Middle American orthodoxy, Archie Bunker, captured, "I'll tell you one thing about Richard Nixon. He keeps Pat home. Which is where Roosevelt should have kept Eleanor. Instead he let her run around loose till one day she discovered the colored. We never knew they was there. She told them they was gettin' the short end of the stick and we been havin' trouble ever since."⁵⁷⁵ The Nixonian message was always more nuanced, couched in anti-busing and states' rights rhetoric. But at its core the meaning was surprisingly similar. It was a response to a dominant culture that not only loathed but feared the prospect of continued turmoil, a populace terrified of the unknown. It was an existential soup thickened by a provincial myopia that Nixon and his men were able to capitalize upon by fostering the specter of an 'extremist' George McGovern. This proved not to be much of a rhetorical stretch, as the South Dakotan's own utterances provided the Nixon team with endless rounds of attack material, especially given the senator's vocal and controversial stands on social issues and Vietnam. The president's White House loyalists had predicted this would occur and thus wished for McGovern as their opponent in the fall over everyone else in the Democratic field. Nixon's strategists understood that it would be easy to make voters see the senator as someone outside the mainstream of American political thought, and moreover, a "radical" who flirted with the dangerous edge of the antiwar movement. On this point, McGovern's own words had betrayed him with millions of voters.

The concussive effects of 1968, ones that appeared to reemerge in 1970 to threaten Nixon's chance at a second term, had enflamed the fears of an already receptive and conditioned public that America was heading for the edge. Nixon and his men understood where the majority was, and it was not with the campus protestors, the rock throwers, and the 'shouters.' Nixon's team portrayed the president as the cultural backstop—a solid resolute leader whose re-

⁵⁷⁴ Please see Melvin Small, "Presidency: How Do Historians Evaluate the Administration of Richard Nixon?", George Mason University's *History News Network*, October 12, 2001, <http://hnn.us/articles/437.html>

⁵⁷⁵ The Archie Bunker quotation is found in the *Washington Post*, June 23, 1972, B7.

sculptured image after the mid-term elections clearly resonated with this majority. But this is not a well-told tale. As speechwriter Bill Safire predicted, the damage done by the “Kroghs, Liddys, Hunts, and even Colsons,” will result in the “the noncampaign of ’72 [being] remembered chiefly because of what was going on in the way of furious fund-raising, dirty trucks, break-ins and bugging—all, hard to believe, at the time matters of little import to the Candidate or most of the people in the White House.” Safire believed that the plans for the election were really firmed up after 1970, when the team, sensing the mood in the nation, turned the ship around by going after the president’s new majority. As Safire recalled, CREEP was little more than a “mopping-up operation, largely ignored by the Candidate and most of his men, who were smugly concentrating on what they could do with the mandate they would surely receive.”⁵⁷⁶

On this point, Theodore White essentially agreed that the actions of the plumbers meant little to voters in 1972. As he suggested at the time, “the Watergate scandal played only a secondary role in the campaign of 1972...[and] was only one of a number of major stories in the election of 1972.” Not only did the scandal not threaten a Nixon victory, but the presidential biographer believed that it was possible that the landslide could have even been greater without it. “Had it not been for Watergate, it is quite possible that Richard Nixon’s margin would have been increased by another three or four million votes,” a victory of perhaps 65 percent to 35 percent “that might never again be approached in American two-party history.” White (much like those internal White House memorandums had shown) concluded that the path that George McGovern wanted, that of drastic change and the expansion of the federal government, “frightened too many Americans; too many had been hurt along that road ... [T]he Democratic Party, which called itself the party of the future, had become, in their eyes, the party of the past. They turned instead to Richard Nixon ... For this time, they preferred to live their own lives privately—unplagued by moralities, or war, or riots, or violence.”⁵⁷⁷ As the late biographer suggested, Nixon had used his “enormous manipulative skill” to aid in the victory, “but the break-ins and lying had contributed nothing to it. Nixon had forced issues to popular clarity better than any President since Roosevelt; McGovern had sharpened them; and on the issues, Nixon won.”⁵⁷⁸

Yet the story of overt (if manipulative) politics over covert operations has received little attention in the intervening years, even though the evidence for it has been available in many respects since election night. Immediately after the victory, Nixon’s men tried to figure out for themselves how the president managed to capture more than 60 percent of the vote. Staffer Ken Khachigian’s immediate post-election analysis prepared for Pat Buchanan, penned as soon as the election results were called is an illuminating and largely accurate summation of what went right for Nixon and what went wrong for McGovern before the post-election pundits published a single word. The document suggested that McGovern lost because he “was trying to sell an

⁵⁷⁶ Safire, *Before the Fall*, 313, 652-653.

⁵⁷⁷ White, *The Making of the President, 1972*, 267-268, 298, 371.

⁵⁷⁸ White, *Breach of Faith*, 423-424. A Gallup Poll taken two weeks after the election found that 48 percent of Americans were unaware of the Watergate break-in. Colson mused to E. Howard Hunt after the election that the caper may have worked well as a deliberate attempt to divert the nation’s attention from the real issues. “I always thought when I write my memoirs...of this campaign—that I’m gonna say that the Watergate was brilliantly conceived as an escapade that would divert the Democrats’ attention from the real issues, and therefore permit us to win a landslide that we probably wouldn’t have won otherwise.” See Lukas, *Nightmare*, 276. Additionally, as Theodore White pointed out, “the Watergate scandal only played a secondary role in the campaign of 1972. . .; the story of Watergate was only one of a number of major stories in the election of 1972.” See White, *The Making of the President, 1972*, 267-268.

unpopular, unwanted ideology to the American people.” To Khachigian, there was no question that in a contest “between drastically differing political philosophies,” the country’s political left received “a good licking in a fair contest.” He warned that the “liberal apologists” would try to cast the loss as McGovern’s, and not the core of his ideals. “They will argue that liberalism is still viable.” But the election results proved to those in the inner circle’s brain trust that it really was not a sound governing ideology but one that always appeared to reside in “elitism, close-mindedness, moral righteousness,” which were “all fundamentals of the liberal-left political ideology.” While Khachigian did not mention that his team did its best to tie McGovern to those “elites” and “radicals,” the memorandum made it clear that those who historically supported the traditional core of the Democratic Party did not want anything to do with these images and turned to Nixon when their party was overtaken “by the McGovern guerillas.”⁵⁷⁹

Of course the post-election analyses make it clear that the Democrats in 1972 appeared doomed before the campaign left the convention floor. As the Khachigian memorandum recalled, McGovern’s “leftism was fully exposed on national television,” resulting in a “shock [that] for some probably has not yet worn off.” There was no soft shoeing around this issue, as the team knew how these images played in Middle America. As Khachigian wrote, this constituency could not stomach “the spectacle of the abortion people, the libbers and homosexuals.” The senator from South Dakota appeared surrounded by radicals and the televised convention images for the Nixon White House were golden, especially “all those damn hippy kids and free love adherents.” That McGovern’s politics were associated with the counter culture, according to the recap, “only made his radicalism worse.” Much of this was painfully true for some in the Democratic Party who had wished to retake the White House in 1972. Khachigian was pleased to tell Buchanan that McGovern had “walked out of that convention a radical.” And it never got any better as the opinion polls since the summer showed consistently that the public resented McGovern “running down America.” As the aide pointed out, “Not only did the polls show McGovern misreading the country’s mood, they also showed that McGovern misread the public’s perception of the correct position on the issues. [Pollster Lou] Harris found out that in the summer the President had the preferable position on 15 out of 16 issues.”⁵⁸⁰

What helped the president to have a “preferable position” on the issues of the day was that his men had put together a strategy that worked. Charles Colson knew that his side of the internal White House debate had won the day and it had paid huge dividends. As Colson wrote in his memoir,

Through 1971 the White House staff was divided over political strategy. Ehrlichman, Mitchell, speech-writer Ray Price and others argued for an appeal to traditional Republican suburbanites and to the liberal, uncommitted voters. An opposing group—speech-writer Pat Buchanan; Mike Balzano, a talented young member of my staff; and I—argued the case for capturing the Middle-America-Wallace vote. The winds of social change sweeping across the country were, we felt, changing minds and hearts to our position.⁵⁸¹

According to Colson, by the summer of 1971, the inner circle knew that the food on the political plate would be federal aid for parochial schools, a tougher stand by Nixon against liberalized abortion, and a crackdown on drugs. In the South, as the special counsel recalled, “We rode the

⁵⁷⁹ Memorandum from Ken Khachigian to Pat Buchanan, November 7, 1972, WHSF, Contested Files, Box 41, Nixon Library.

⁵⁸⁰ Memorandum from Ken Khachigian to Pat Buchanan, November 7, 1972, WHSF, Contested Files, Box 41, Nixon Library.

⁵⁸¹ Colson, *Born Again*, 66.

issue of busing for all it was worth, stealing the issue which propelled George Wallace to smashing victories in the Florida and Michigan primaries.” The team was also well aware that other issues such as amnesty for draft resisters were an “anathema” to their “new majority.” With this view, Colson remembered, “Slowly we inched up in the polls.”⁵⁸²

It is clear that Nixon’s men had reconstituted the issues they had first raised in 1968, but that 1972 offered a greater opportunity. Central to this thrust was the belief that disaffected voters would not go for Alabama Governor George Wallace as they had four years earlier. Instead, the team felt that this alienated constituency was up for grabs, especially if the Democratic Party chose a candidate it could paint as a radical. With the violence and turmoil of 1970, Colson knew that the “law-and-order standard which Richard Nixon and his men first unfurled in the 1968 campaign was now as American as wearing a flag pin on one’s lapel, while the ‘era of permissiveness’ became the enemy.” It was of course the *critical* change from 1968 and Nixon’s special counsel was accurate in his assessment that the playing field had never been in better shape. For the team, George McGovern had made it appear that his party machinery had been “captured by reformers and liberals” and were thus “forced to equivocate over busing, compromise on abortion, duck amnesty, and as we charged, go ‘soft’ on criminals and pot smokers.” Not only had the Nixon team, in Colson’s words, stepped in and seized “the high ground, politically speaking,” they had actually “believed in the rightness” of their cause “with a religious fervor.” While the plan to pander to this constituency was part of a deliberate strategy, Nixon’s former special counsel believed that it was not cynicism but consistent with the president’s “deeply held convictions.” As Colson suggested, “the President thirsted for a restoration of the old-fashioned values, something a restless nation could rely on and believe in.”⁵⁸³

Cynical or not, the Buchanan-Colson strategy to hit hard on McGovern’s “softness” on these core issues succeeded with devastating results. As columnist Carroll Kilpatrick noted the day after the election, voters were not so much thinking about the president but with “the parade of McGovern supporters at Miami Beach who called for immediate withdrawal from Vietnam, who advocated quotas, abortion, gay liberation, youth power and demonstrators.” He, like others, also gave voice to the strategy that worked very well for the president, and that was to turn McGovern into a radical. “It wasn’t that McGovern was necessarily a ‘radical’ or captive of the new politics; it was that he was *perceived* as a radical and ideologist and that too many voters distrusted some of his most visible advocates.” As Kilpatrick correctly pointed out, all Nixon had to do was “carry out his duties and keep his cool.” Nixon’s men had read the signs after the 1970 debacle and knew that keeping “cool” was indeed the winning ticket. They had also taken a long hard look at the public opinion polling and concluded that they were in step. It was easy. As the journalist had correctly pointed out, in 1970, Americans were 86-14 percent against legalizing marijuana; 78-22 percent against busing; 91 to 9 percent in favor of more police on the streets; and 79-21 percent for withholding aid from colleges failing to expel riotous students. As Kilpatrick suggested, Nixon spent the next two years identifying “himself with the majority position” against drugs, busing, crime, higher taxes, amnesty, big government, and permissiveness, while championing a strong defense, diplomacy with cold war enemies, and speaking the work ethic and traditional values of the heartland. In high contrast, Nixon had painted the perfect radical image of McGovern. Much as in 1964, when challenger Barry Goldwater was depicted as occupying the outer edge of American political discourse, in 1972,

⁵⁸² Colson, *Born Again*, 66.

⁵⁸³ Colson, *Born Again*, 66.

“the implication was that the McGovernites were elitists, leaders of a Goldwater-type minority within the Democratic Party.” Kilpatrick, like others, had noticed that in the wake of the ’64 campaign, the president and his team had learned much about how to win big “by studying how Lyndon Johnson waged his 1964 campaign against Goldwater.”⁵⁸⁴

Other astute observers in the national media had echoed the words of Nixon’s men in the final days of the campaign. The most important factor, according to some was that “Senator McGovern and his supporters completely misread the people’s discontent.” As the *Wall Street Journal*’s Vermont Royster suggested, the Democrats had made the critical error of listening to “the noise of the anti-Vietnam demonstrators, left-wing theorists, rebellious youth, angry blacks and the like that the country was ready for a revolution in politics.” The party under McGovern’s direction also failed to understand Vietnam, and “mistook the dissatisfactions about Vietnam for a willingness to cut-and-run; his solution was simply to quit and beg Hanoi to be charitable.” But, as he noted to his readers, it was no different with issues closer to home “from taxes to social legislation” and “real grievances” like busing. While Royster suggested that the busing issue was “overblown,” what it “symbolizes is not. People have grown resentful at having the long arm of the federal government reach out to dictate to local school boards, zoning commissions and city halls.”⁵⁸⁵

All of this, however, was more than just post-election hindsight. Back in August, some commentators in the media sensed not only what Nixon and his boys were up to but that it looked like an unbeatable strategy. As the *Washington Post*’s Marquis Childes astutely suggested, in 1964, the Republicans “nominated Barry Goldwater on a ticket that spoke to an extremist faction, anticipating what was the most disastrous defeat, save one, in American political history. The cherished belief of many Republicans here is that the McGovern-Shriver ticket similarity represents a small faction of the other party and will likewise go down to disaster.”⁵⁸⁶ Additionally, three months before the election, political strategist Kevin Phillips predicted that the disaffected voters in the heartland, including the alienated Wallace voters, would not support the politician who emerged from the Democratic convention. As Phillips put it, the Democratic nominee did not seem to understand the mood of the country. “McGovern has got a great issue in alienation, but I wonder if he knows the cause. The people who are alienated are the ones who don’t want pot, who don’t want abortion, who don’t want to pay more taxes.” Phillips suggested that if the mood of the country was a sense of frustration with “the trampling of traditional values, and if major chunks of the old Democratic coalition are angry at the cultural upheaval represented by George McGovern, then Richard Nixon will come out on top.” The strategist was quite certain that because of this national mood, the Nixon team had correctly begun to consolidate and hold their support from 1968; maximize the Wallace voters; woo Catholics, seniors, organized labor, white ethnics, independents, and conservatives into a winning coalition. On November 7, he expected “Americans to vote for sobriety and stability, giving Richard Nixon a decisive reelection majority.”⁵⁸⁷

A major issue aiding the success of this strategy was that George Wallace was not a factor in 1972. Historian Rick Perlstein suggests that although the president certainly welcomed the presence of Wallace in the race as an instrument of division in the Democratic field, he could not have predicted that the governor would have run as a Democrat. While hinting that there

⁵⁸⁴ Carroll Kilpatrick, the *Washington Post*, November 8, 1972, A16. Emphasis added.

⁵⁸⁵ Vermont Royster, the *Wall Street Journal*, November 9, 1972, 26.

⁵⁸⁶ Marquis Childes, the *Washington Post*, August 22, 1972, A19.

⁵⁸⁷ See the *New York Times*, August 6, 1972, SM8, 9, 34.

might have been a secret deal between the president and the late Alabama political icon, he points out correctly that Nixon had hoped that “Wallace would screw the Democrats,” but he would not “be in the race long enough to screw him.”⁵⁸⁸ As the files in the National Archives make clear, Nixon and his men were more than just hopeful about Wallace’s lack of political staying power, but confident that he would not be a factor in 1972 as he had been in 1968. Unlike that chaotic year, there were many opportunities for the Nixon administration to attract not only Wallace voters but disaffected citizens in general, which comprised much of the southern governor’s core support four year earlier. Moreover, Nixon campaign strategists were banking on these voters staying away from McGovern. As historian Stanley Kutler points out, the ’72 campaign “was to be very different from the calculated divisiveness of 1968,” as Nixon “assiduously courted Democrats, labor, blacks, Jews, and the young, while expecting (quite correctly) that his 1968 constituency would remain with him if only because it had nowhere else to go.”⁵⁸⁹

Early on, however, Nixon and his men did worry that these voters might have had somewhere else to go. Given the president’s low poll numbers after 1970, the rise of a moderate Edmund Muskie, who was not sounding like a radical, threatened to capture the constituency that Nixon and his men so strongly coveted. But with the senator from Maine unhorsed in the New Hampshire snow and the rise of George McGovern, everything had begun to come together for the president’s men in the White House. Nixon staffers like Khachigian believed the result was an all but inevitable clash of an extremist radical and a heartland warrior who read the nation’s soul. Like many others in the White House, Khachigian maintained that McGovern had committed the political original sin: “In a nutshell, McGovern was wrong from the start.” As a result, the American people had repudiated his “alien ideas. Let’s not blame it on his political amateur standing—after all, he did some quite intelligent politicking at times—let’s put the blame where it belongs: on the elitist, leftward movement in America which was born of Kennedy, raised in the Great Society and cut down by the grocer’s son who saw the excesses and called ‘em like he saw ‘em.”⁵⁹⁰

Pat Buchanan’s own analysis was more pragmatic and less of the populist wet dream described by his assistant. In his immediate post-election memorandum for the president, the speechwriter described how the team’s plan to let others do the fighting was a winning strategy. As the chief political strategist suggested in his brief, the team’s surrogate program “proved to be one of the most effective weapons for keeping McGovern on the defensive.” Keeping the president sequestered in the White House and enhancing Nixon’s presidential image had also paid dividends as it had “succeeded in reinforcing the President’s image of competence, while creating doubts about McGovern’s ability to meet the demands of the Presidency.” Additionally, the president’s occasional radio and television appearances “served to project him into the campaign arena just enough” to keep their voters interested and their opponent on the defensive. This “front-porch” presidential strategy of limited campaign appearances had worked beautifully as Buchanan rightly believed, because it was designed to provide the president with “maximum

⁵⁸⁸ Perlstein, *Nixonland*, 631-632.

⁵⁸⁹ Kutler, *The Wars of Watergate*, 237.

⁵⁹⁰ Memorandum from Ken Khachigian to Pat Buchanan, November 7, 1972, WHSF, Contested Files, Box 41, Nixon Library.

use of his office,” a plan that left McGovern with “no target and no opportunity to close the great gap in public support.”⁵⁹¹

Was this all post-election euphoric blather? It appears not. Some Democrats also believed that they had been beaten by a straight up political approach, without the help of smoke and mirrors or Segretti-style dirty tricks. As McGovern campaign manager Frank Mankiewicz pointed out:

To sum it all up: When we talk about the McGovern campaign, we ought to look at the Nixon campaign, which was the model. It spent an inordinate amount of time and money that originally was ticketed for television and ended up on the street in one of the best get-out-the-vote operations in terms of direct mail and telephones that many of us had ever seen. I have a feeling that the time we spent on election day getting out the vote was in part responsible for turning out so large a Nixon vote. I would think the figures will show that the Nixon campaign beat us at what we do best—getting out the vote. It’s probably the first time a Republican campaign has ever done that so successfully. It was a remarkable job.⁵⁹²

However, both sides in 1972 had some difficulty in encouraging voters to head out to the polls on Election Day. The likely reason was a lack of a legitimate contest between the candidates. Since the summer, George McGovern’s numbers in the public opinion polls had flat lined and never recovered at any point throughout the fall campaign. The lopsided poll numbers in Nixon’s favor actually caused some consternation in the White House, as the president’s team worried that a low turnout would hurt Republicans more than Democrats. Nixon’s men believed that McGovern’s young followers would be motivated to cast their votes and worried that complacency over the apparent mismatch would keep Republicans at home. Indeed, the 55.21% turnout of eligible voters was the lowest since 1948 with some voters from both parties staying home on November 7. This less than overwhelming turnout, however, did not change the reality that the margin between winner and loser was of historic proportions, only eclipsed once before in U.S. history.⁵⁹³

The president himself had revealed that he was well aware of how the nation would respond to his campaign’s message *before* Americans went to the polls. Two days before the election, Nixon agreed to a sit-down interview with *Washington Evening Star* journalist Garnett Horner. The meeting came about in the late afternoon on November 5 at San Clemente, California. Sitting in the blue easy chairs in the president’s office, the two engaged in a far-reaching conversation concerning both the campaign and how Nixon saw his second term in office. Before Americans went to the polls, the president indicated that, unlike George McGovern, he understood how the mood in the nation really shaped up.

Well, let me begin by saying that the liberal establishment, during the four years I have been in the office, thought that I was out of touch with the country. That is not true. What this election will demonstrate is that out across this country, and including, incidentally, up in the Northeast, which is considered to be the

⁵⁹¹ “Critique of the 1972 Campaign,” memorandum from Pat Buchanan to the President, WHSF, Box 33, Nixon Library.

⁵⁹² Mankiewicz’s quotation is found in “Critique of the 1972 Campaign,” memorandum from Pat Buchanan to the President, WHSF, Box 33, Nixon Library. Khachigian, though, called Mankiewicz “an absolute political lightweight who covered up with a quick wit—he gave monumentally bad advice.” See Memorandum from Ken Khachigian to Pat Buchanan, November 7, 1972, WHSF, Contested Files, Box 41, Nixon Library.

⁵⁹³ The low voter percentage was also part of a growing trend, as the 1972 result actually eclipsed the percentage of eligible voters who cast a vote until the presidential election of 2004, when it was finally eclipsed by that year’s paltry 56.70. The elections of 1964 and 1968 also saw a more than two point drop from the 63.06 percent who turned out in 1960.

playground of the limousine liberal set, you find that a solid majority of the American people do not want to go to the far left. What this election will demonstrate is that when a candidate takes basically an extreme position on issues, he inevitably splits his party and assures his defeat.⁵⁹⁴

The president even admitted that the press covered this angle “honestly.” Accordingly to Nixon, his team won on the issues, including, his stand for a strong national defense, “peace with honor” in Vietnam, opposing “busing for racial balance,” and standing up against “permissiveness” and “amnesty.” Nixon was clear that he placed himself in the middle of the political spectrum, suggesting that most Americans believed he was a “centrist” on the issues. Foretelling works by Joan Hoff and Dean Kotlowksi, Nixon boldly suggested that his presidency “will be known as an Administration which advocated . . . more significant reform than any Administration since Franklin Roosevelt’s in 1932.”⁵⁹⁵

The politician that resonated with much of Middle America, however, was not ‘Nixon the sweeping reformist,’ far from it. According to the inner circle, the president was propelled by those who were moved by the “gut” and the heart. As Stanley Kutler observed, “the President’s erstwhile campaign manager [John Mitchell] had no doubts as to the meaning of the 1972 election.” According to Mitchell, Nixon was the “personification” of what voters wanted in the White House. Americans may not have appreciated the “brilliance” of Nixon’s foreign policy or the “nuances of his economic policy,” but they understood it was in the best interests of themselves and the country. As Kutler wrote, John Mitchell believed that “Richard Nixon was the one who really had hold of the national pulse.”⁵⁹⁶

That national pulse, while strong, even hardnosed, was also erratic and skittish. The team sensed that Americans out in the heartland wanted a leader to reassure them that everything would be okay, that there was someone looking out for their interests who understood their concerns. Nixon and his men were not merely cynical propagandists, spinning and serving what would sell, as they believed both that they were dead right and that the nation depended on their leadership. They were the partisans and fighters just like the millions they represented. If citizens were fearful and narrow in their views, so too were Nixon and his men. This insight worked in capturing disaffected white ethnics, labor, and Catholic votes in 1972, voting blocs susceptible to arguments against permissiveness, pornography, abortion, but open to calls for a strong national defense, peace with honor, safe neighborhoods, and aid to parochial schools.⁵⁹⁷ The Nixonian postwar stance resonated with his staff. “He made me feel proud of my country” speechwriter Bill Safire wrote. “If you are in your mid-forties, you have been for or against Richard Nixon in national elections, with only one exception, ever since you have been able to vote. He is part of you: a backboard, a mirror, a stimulant, a palliative, an object of your hate or adoration, your grudging respect or mild distaste, but like it or not he is a presence, the presence

⁵⁹⁴ See the *Washington Evening Star*, November 9, 1972, A8. See also Ronald Ziegler’s memo for the President’s file, January 27, 1973, POF, Box 90, NARA.

⁵⁹⁵ The president gave the interview on the strict assurance that the article would not appear if he were to lose the election that Tuesday. In the November 9th edition of the *Star*, the publication provided a complete transcript of the interview. See the *Washington Evening Star*, November 9, 1972, A8. See also Ronald Ziegler’s memo for the President’s file, January 27, 1973, POF, Box 90, NARA; Hoff, *Nixon Reconsidered*; and Kotlowksi, *Nixon’s Civil Rights*.

⁵⁹⁶ Kutler, *The Wars of Watergate*, 238. This, however, pretty much captures Kutler’s comments on the meaning of Nixon other than the crimes of Watergate.

⁵⁹⁷ Safire, *Before the Fall*, 562.

of the adult postwar generation.”⁵⁹⁸ And that generation had ensured that a man like Nixon would succeed in the political game.

That postwar adult constituency or the “greatest generation,” the incongruous moniker coined by television news reader Tom Brokaw, accepted Safire’s ubiquitous Nixon, the tough conservative adult leader who demanded respect if nothing else.⁵⁹⁹ But it also had rewarded and stroked the *other* Nixon, the scrappy, serial communist baiter who fed off the grist of an emerging Cold War. It should not surprise that the ‘confrontational Nixon’ would appeal to Brokaw’s chosen ones, those who endured the Great Depression, fought and won the Second World War, met Communists in the Korean peninsula, were curiously and conspicuously silent on civil rights, and who wanted a fighter with whiskey in his blood in Washington. They were the “silent” majority of Americans who in 1952 cheered in their homes as Nixon referred to Adlai Stevenson as “Adlai the appeaser...who got a Ph.D. from Dean Acheson’s College of Cowardly Communist Containment,” who called Harry Truman a “traitor,” John Kennedy a “liar” and Lyndon Johnson an “ignoramus.” The grocer’s son attracted those who were drawn to the junkyard dog part of this politician who in their stead bit down on post-war American liberalism and refused to let go. Interestingly, Nixon’s battles in the 1950s to cling to President Dwight Eisenhower’s coattails from the Checkers affair to the Fund crisis had taught him how to fight but not how to let go of the proverbial neck once he had won for fear of political ruin.⁶⁰⁰

The reality that Richard Nixon appeared to believe his own rhetoric certainly helped to provide him with a greater authenticity in the heartland. It should not surprise that the men he chose to represent him shared many of his traits. It should also not come as much of a shock that the nickname for Nixon’s new chief of staff in 1969 revealed a characteristic shared by most everyone in his inner circle; the daily battles during the 1972 election revealed this in Technicolor. Haldeman was known as the “SOB,” a likening very close to Nixon’s own pedigree—a Frank Nixon gospel that life meant fight.⁶⁰¹ It had followed the man from California through his political career from his personal style to those he later chose as his team. A young Richard Nixon had learned to be a “SOB” from his first campaigns. He had maneuvered his way onto Eisenhower’s vice presidential ticket based largely for his communist fighting potential, becoming the commander-in-chief’s hit man. When Nixon became president in 1969, he brought in a type of man he understood: an SOB without par, H.R. Haldeman, who subsequently brought in other fighters from his advertising days. They were the ones who in the 1950s as teenagers and young men stood and cheered when ‘Nixon the fighter’ had challenged the communists near and far and pursued Alger Hiss without a leash. Nixon had attracted a faithful following in the 1950s and found a new voice in the reactionary stance that emerged out of the chaos of the 1960s, a disturbance that reverberated throughout much of Middle America.

The president and his men had also capitalized on another Nixon virtue valued in the heartland: his stature as the quintessential self-made man. His upward mobility was a sign for others that despite meager beginnings, men like Dick Nixon could rise to capture the highest office in the land. It was a mantra shared by those on his team, like Chuck Colson, who were proud of his self-starting pedigree, and embraced political warfare as a way of settling political

⁵⁹⁸ Safire, *Before the Fall*, 5-6.

⁵⁹⁹ See Tom Brokaw, *The Greatest Generation* (New York: Random House, 1998).

⁶⁰⁰ Please see Wills, *Nixon Agonistes*, 90. See also pages 87-89, 114-135. On the campaign trail in 1960, Democratic candidate John Kennedy characterized Richard Nixon as a “circus elephant,” who could do little more than hurl insults at him, including at his hero Harry Truman and his running mate Lyndon Johnson.

⁶⁰¹ Nixon, *RN*, 12-13.

and cultural scores. With men like Haldeman and Colson, the inner circle helped fashion media images to fit the nation's temperament,⁶⁰² and chose to represent those whom the "elites" would not. As Nixon was proud to say, "I was anxious to defend the 'square' virtues."⁶⁰³ Historian Rick Perlstein suggests this feeling went both ways. "By 1971, more and more Americans were professing to love Dick Nixon—not despite the fear and dread that produced the Plumbers, but in some sense because of it. They loved him, too, for his squareness."⁶⁰⁴ As journalist Richard Rovere observed, Nixon's entire demeanor was an easy sell in the heartland. "His general appearance, his dress, his whole style of living and being, commend him to the multitudes who share his aspirations for a clear title to a ranch-house, furs for the wife, and pets for the children."⁶⁰⁵

But as Tom Wicker noted, there might have been also something darker and more primal at play. As Nixon had once admitted, "You've got to be a little evil to understand those people out there. You have to have known the dark side of life to understand those people." Wicker, for one, believed that it was the realist in Nixon that understood this all too well. "Perhaps Richard Nixon represented a harder and clearer national self-assessment. In the dark of their souls, which Nixon seems to have perceived, Americans could have seen in him themselves as they were, not as they frequently dreamed of being."⁶⁰⁶ The president understood that all too well. As Nixon scholar Margaret MacMillan has written, the career politician dreamed of personal virtue. "Nixon did many immoral things in his life but he longed to be good."⁶⁰⁷

The connection with Middle Americans also had an unpleasant connotation for people such as Nixon, and it is evident in the vocabulary of the 'common man' that was so prevalent in the campaign literature prepared by his men. As Theodore White observed, "The Nixons were poor in a way that only the poor could understand. Poverty curdles character as well as strengthening it. It crumbles some men. It makes others hard. Poverty soiled Nixon; he grew up to be hard—and vulnerable."⁶⁰⁸ But it was just this quality that also made the politician so attractive. As Wicker suggested, many Americans "might even have understood that Nixon, or anyone, could believe himself forced on occasion to cheat a little, lie a little, find an edge, get out front of more favored competitors any way he could—as they themselves had done, or would do—in the unrelenting battles of life."⁶⁰⁹

Much of it was also rhetorical gold. These Americans were the ones who baked pies, frequented the lodge and legion halls; they bowled on Saturday night and went to church on Sunday. They were the ones who believed they sang the national anthem a little louder than the Democrats at their party's convention, hands held firmly over hearts. "They were clean, neat people," Theodore White wrote, recalling what he saw on the floor of the Republican National Convention in Miami. There were no "long-hairs" or beards, no cowboy boots, blue jeans, few minorities. As journalist Hugh Sidney suggested, the crowd was representative of the Middle American voters Nixon both appealed to and those he knew he needed to reach. They were the middle class property owners, the farmers, the ranchers, the miners, the teachers, the small business owners, and the middle managers. They were not the "elite" but they also did "not dig

⁶⁰² Nixon, *RN*, 304.

⁶⁰³ Nixon, *RN*, 353-354.

⁶⁰⁴ Perlstein, *Nixonland*, 597.

⁶⁰⁵ Wicker, *One of Us*, 23.

⁶⁰⁶ Wicker, *One of Us*, 686.

⁶⁰⁷ MacMillan, *Nixon in China*, 14-15.

⁶⁰⁸ White, *Breach of Faith*, 83.

⁶⁰⁹ Wicker, *One of Us*, 687.

ditches...They run the firms that build industrial plants and houses; they sell refrigerators, play pianos, bury the dead and straighten teeth.”⁶¹⁰

If Nixon was, in the words of Tom Wicker, “one of us,” some observers believed it was most likely because many Middle Americans saw in him a man who would fight the battles they wanted fought. It was certainly what had attracted loyalists like Pat Buchanan and Chuck Colson to his side. As California Governor Pete Wilson suggested at Nixon’s 1994 memorial, Nixon attracted those who had a thirst for struggle. While the president possessed other qualities, Wilson claimed that he would “always remember him for another quality. It is the quality that great fighters have. They call it heart. Heart is what let Richard Nixon climb back into the ring time and again when almost anyone else would have thrown in the towel.” Following the same theme, long time Nixon loyalist Bob Dole laid it out at his political hero’s funeral. “The American people love a fighter, and in Dick Nixon they found a gallant one.”⁶¹¹ Not everyone was pleased with the niceties that day. Former Undersecretary of State George Ball was disgusted by the memorial speeches, calling the entire episode “the most obscene orgy of revisionism that I’ve ever seen in this country. Why should they rehabilitate the son of a bitch?”⁶¹² Bob Dole’s gushing and George Ball’s umbrage notwithstanding, prior to Watergate, Nixon’s fighting heartland hardhat populist language did indeed resonate, not only with the Colsons, the Buchanans, and the Haldemans but with Middle Americans, as a majority of the adult population were against the same issues that Nixon was against—“acid, amnesty, and abortion” and for the same tried and true clichés as he was for—“peace with honor” and “law and order.”⁶¹³

The letters to the editor in the nation’s major newspapers spoke to this reality. “We members of the ‘silent majority’ have at last spoken out in the landslide election of Richard Nixon,” stated one such letter writer in the *New York Times*. “Not because we love him or because he is the incumbent President. We voted for Nixon because we are for what he is for.”⁶¹⁴ Another suggested that “when Richard Nixon said over and over, ‘Peace with honor,’ patriotism went to the polls.”⁶¹⁵ The vote, perhaps a repudiation of the Sixties as much as a vote *for* Richard Nixon, in many ways represented a calling from the heartland that Nixon’s men heard and responded to after their wake-up call after the violence of 1970 at Kent State and hundreds of other campuses across the nation.⁶¹⁶ As Rick Perlstein has astutely pointed out, “Nixon acted not despite the Silent Majority he described as so pure and decent, but in a sense on their behalf, and even at their request.”⁶¹⁷

But this “silent majority” was just that—a *majority*. Indeed, this large middling center that Nixon claimed on election night had not been historically party-specific. Democrat,

⁶¹⁰ White, *The Making of the President, 1972*, 241.

⁶¹¹ Selections of the Nixon funeral speeches come from the Nixon Library. Please also see Wicker, *One of Us*, 14, where the author suggests that for Nixon, “fighting was what life was about.” See also Nixon, *RN*, 12.

⁶¹² Small, *The Presidency of Richard Nixon*, 308.

⁶¹³ Nixon knew as well as anyone that to fire up the partisans, it was necessary to point out that one was against the same issues as they were. See Richard Nixon, *In the Arena* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1990), 245.

⁶¹⁴ *The New York Times*, November 23, 1972, 34. Such was also the case for those inside the White House. As Jeb Magruder pointed out, “I never saw the slightest indication that Haldeman disagreed with anything that Nixon said or did . . . Haldeman was just as hard-line as Nixon. He hated Nixon’s political enemies as much as Nixon hated them.”

⁶¹⁵ *The New York Times*, November 14, 1972, 46.

⁶¹⁶ For a good look at these issues, please see Kenneth Heineman, *Campus Wars* (New York: NYU Press, 1994), and Philip Caputo, *13 Seconds: A Look Back at the Kent State Shootings* (New York: Chamberlain Brothers, 2005).

⁶¹⁷ Perlstein, *Nixonland*, 519.

Republican, and Independent voters split somewhat unevenly between the major parties in 1960 and 1968, and Lyndon Johnson's 1964 landslide captured Democrats, Republicans and Independent voters for a big tent majority. This majority consisting of rather pragmatic Middle American voters was up for grabs in 1972, and was captured by Nixon and his men because they had correctly read the electoral tea leaves and McGovern did not.

Despite what the Sixties appear to be in the rearview mirror, this was not a divided or fractured nation. Just as they had for Lyndon Johnson in 1964, members of both parties voted for Nixon in his reelection bid. This not so silent majority was the face of the post-war generation. In 1972, Nixon and his men delivered for this Middle American consensus in ways it could only have dreamt about in 1968. Whereas the election result of that tumultuous year was razor thin with the majority splitting their vote between the two major parties as they had done in 1960, such was not the case four years later, where Nixon's men were appeared to be in step with the mood across the nation, bringing home the vote with almost every demographic and in every region. While it appears that the president always had a loyal following, including the solid supporters that were with him in 1960 and 1968 in tight contests, the difference in 1972 was that Nixon not only retained this support but added disaffected Democrats, Independents, Wallaceites, Northern industrial workers, organized Labor, white ethnics, Catholics, and even 40 percent of the Jewish vote. In capturing that large middle spectrum, the president achieved a victory of which fellow Republican Barry Goldwater could only have dreamed as he captured 49 of 50 states. As Vermont Royster pointed out a week following the election in the *Wall Street Journal*, "not the least interesting thing about President Nixon's victory was the evenness of it across the country. He did not win by an avalanche here and a trickle there....This suggests that however you assess the mood of the country, it is a national mood and not one splintered by geography."⁶¹⁸

The mood also suggests *why* Nixon really won the way that he did. Plagued not by tales of Watergate in the *Washington Post*, it appears that the majority of voting-age Americans wanted Nixon, or at the least, what his team sold as a resolute commander-in-chief who shared the majority's core values. They would not worry as much about being likable, as with the fallout from Watergate, but likeminded. As the *Wall Street Journal* suggested two days following the landslide, "the critics fail to see why the Watergate episode and the like failed to move more voters. To the moralistic viewpoint they seemed the perfect embodiment of the choice at hand." But voters saw beyond that episode, as they "were perfectly capable of taking the attitude that while Watergate is deplorable and calls for a good housecleaning, its impact on the future of the Republic is not of the same order as that of foreign policy and so on." As the *Journal* proclaimed, quite correctly, Nixon's landslide was a "mandate for realism," as it was "the judgment of the American people that the job of politics is to deal with reality, not to beget utopia." The voters adopted a "moral realism," as the world is not supposed to be perfect, it is only to work well. In the wake of the clear destruction of McGovern at the polls, the *Journal* suggested that Nixon's critics could take a lesson and curb some of their idealism for a "more realistic morality," as "they will profit and so will the nation."⁶¹⁹

Letters to the editor once again bore this contention out. As one writer observed, "For whatever reasons, a seasoned political veteran who knows the ropes is more comfortable than a chance at real movement; security is presently prevailing over growth."⁶²⁰ In the wake of the

⁶¹⁸ Vermont Royster, the *Wall Street Journal*, November 15, 1972, 20.

⁶¹⁹ The *Wall Street Journal*, November 9, 1972, 26.

⁶²⁰ The *New York Times*, November 13, 1972, 36.

mid-term elections, Nixon's men learned that the critical issue was a domestic 'realism.' Americans in large numbers wanted a calm and reassuring leader who would steady the ship of state. The subsequent strategy to keep the president in the White House acting presidential was a clear winner.

This is hardly the enduring image of Richard Nixon and his men at the capstone of the president's career, ushering in the second widest margin of victory in the history of American presidential elections. Often Nixon only appears to reflect the darkness; he and his loyal aides operating in a bunker, shadowy and disconnected. Additionally, and importantly, is the notion that Nixon really did not understand the nation he led. As Theodore White suggested in *Breach of Faith* following the Watergate scandal, Nixon "had not really learned the way America works."⁶²¹ Is this a true reflection of a politician who had been a central player on the national political scene for more than two decades? Or is it one of the initial post-Watergate constructions that began to view the domestic side of the Nixon presidency through the lens of plumbers with flashlights, thereby missing not only the strategy and the overwhelming reception it garnered but the connection to the great American heartland? In reality, Nixon scholarship largely followed this lead, including otherwise excellent works by Melvin Small, Herbert Parmet, and Stephen Ambrose. The domestic political realism of the Nixon team after 1970, however, should not be summarily equated with cynicism. The historical view could easily be broader than a story of opportunism—a capacious capitalizing on a truck load of McGovern blunders and the bitter fruit of a divided or fractured nation. As Haldeman aide and CREEP villain Jeb Magruder wrote, "the 1972 Nixon campaign has not, in my opinion, received the attention it deserves, both because of Watergate and because the Democratic candidate, Senator McGovern, ran such a poor campaign that analysis has tended to focus on the mistakes rather than on our successes."⁶²²

Watergate has created a distorting and disorienting hall of mirrors, where even solid portraits on Nixon, including that of historian Herbert Parmet, lose some of their meaning when applied to the election of 1972. While Nixon is revealed as a representative figure, the ironic upshot is that Parmet, like others, conceded that the president was ultimately disconnected and isolated from those in the White House, and by implication, the process that brought his message to the American people.⁶²³ While Bob Woodward has written that the president was "cut off from the rest of humanity," it appears that Nixon in reality reflected humanity perhaps all too well.

Scholars such as Stanley Kutler, however, pose a historical absolute, an embedded inevitability that limits Nixon's ultimate meaning and functionally restricts interpretations to the actions of one man. While not merely the isolated loner of Reeves and Woodward, for Kutler, Nixon was the lone criminal protagonist: "In time, Haldeman, Ehrlichman, Mitchell, Colson, Dean, Butterfield, Haig, and the other supporting players in the Watergate drama will fade into the same well-deserved obscurity as have their counterparts in other historical scandals," Kutler wrote. "Ultimately, we leave behind the spear carriers, what the poet Coleridge called the Ancient Mariner's 'strange and ghastly crew.' But Nixon himself will remain as the one indisputably unforgettable and responsible actor." It should be made clear that Kutler was not writing merely about Watergate, but Richard Nixon's entire career. As, according to the historian, Watergate was not only "rooted in the lifelong political personality of Richard Nixon,"

⁶²¹ White, *Breach of Faith*, 436.

⁶²² Magruder, *An American Life*, 318.

⁶²³ Parmet, *Richard Nixon and His America*, 610. Even sympathetic Nixon biographer Tom Wicker reinforces the image of Nixon as alone and isolated in the White House. See *One of Us*, 649-684.

but the man from Whittier “cannot be separated from Watergate.”⁶²⁴ The president’s team then risks becoming the detritus: forgettable faceless henchmen with German and Irish names, political criminals caught in an office break-in during what otherwise was an unremarkable election campaign run by CREEP and a truck load of dirty tricks. Ultimately, they appear relegated to straw men who acted merely under the divine will of a single “responsible” sovereign, a conclusion that renders them essentially blameless. Such a result fails to consider or explain why millions of citizens across the nation supported Nixon from 1948 to 1972, nor does it comment on the distinct possibility that Americans knew much of what there was to know about Richard Nixon but voted for him anyway.

A counter argument is that Americans did not know what they were buying in 1972 when they went to the polls and only discovered the “real” Richard Nixon as the sordid tales emerged during the televised hearings. If historians such as Kutler and Small and others are correct, however, that Watergate represented the president’s entire career, then surely it is safe to assume that others recognized those traits *well* before the dark days of 1974. To Nixon’s faithful fighters and those he wished to speak to in the heartland, however, it seems reasonable to speculate that his political approach and attitudes were not a mystery. Nixon had not been an enigma to his supporters or disconnected or alienated from the partisans. Arguably, voters knew where the politician stood on liberalism, amnesty, pot, elites, and communists. It seems logical to argue that this constituency would have inferred that the politician harbored private prejudices against Jews or the Hollywood and Hyannis Port jet set, and like them, sided with hard-working hard hats who believed in “traditional conservative American values.” Additionally, there can be little question that the image of the politician as ‘Tricky Dicky’ predates by many years the Watergate saga. Posters, campaign literature, newspaper and magazine articles, comic books, and radio and television programs marked his career as a trickster who would do what was necessary to win in the political game.⁶²⁵ That Nixon would enter the battle in 1972 using every trick in the book could not have been a secret to many adults in the nation. It is equally clear that in 1972 the majority of these Americans were willing to vote for him despite the clear history of those “transgressions.”

If historians Melvin Small, Michael Genovese, Stanley Kutler and Fred Emery, and biographers Elizabeth Drew and Richard Reeves are correct that Watergate in some manner represents the essence of Nixon’s political career, then the reality that millions of Americans responded to this seemingly divisive and dark character may tell us as much about his supporters as it does about the man himself. By 1972, Nixon’s warts had been visible to citizens for 25 years, and that had not put him out of public life and the political game but in the best possible position to win in November of that year. This awareness was no more evident than among his

⁶²⁴ Kutler, *The Wars of Watergate*, 617.

⁶²⁵ Please see Wicker, *One of Us*, 33-79, for the long and rich history of Tricky Dicky. Please also see Greg Mitchell’s, *Tricky Dick and the Pink Lady: Richard Nixon vs. Helen Gahagan Douglas—Sexual Politics and the Red Scare, 1950* (New York, NY: Random House, 1998), which provides a great overview of this Nixon legacy well before Watergate. One can also look at pre-Watergate books including Mark Harris, *Mark the Glove Boy: Or, the Last Days of Richard Nixon* (New York, NY: MacMillan, 1964); Gary Allen, *Richard Nixon: The Man Behind the Mask* (Boston, MA: Western Islands Press, 1971); George Johnson, *Richard Nixon: An Intimate and Revealing Portrait of One of America’s Key Political Figures* (Derby, CT: Monarch Books, 1961); Albert Eugene Kahn, *The Unholy Hymnal. Falsities and Delusions Rendered by President Richard M. Nixon* (New York, NY: Simon & Schuster, 1971); William Arthur Millen, *Nixon: Fact, Fable, Fantasy* (New York, NY: Exposition Press, 1970); Arthur Edward Rowse, *Slanted News: A Case Study of the Nixon and Stevenson Fund Stories* (Boston, MA: Beacon Press, 1957); Jules Witcover, *The Resurrection of Richard Nixon* (New York, NY: Putnam, 1970); and Jerry Voorhis, *The Strange Case of Richard Milhous Nixon* (New York, NY: P.S. Eriksson, 1972).

loyal staff who worked with the Californian politician, some in numerous campaigns, for three decades. And when the core of the Nixonian message was packaged and delivered by this team with the full measure of its devotion after the midterm elections of 1970, his support was at an all-time high. In some ways, the election of 1972 was the most perfect example of the nation's support for the post-war ideals—reflected darkly—in the leadership of Richard Nixon. It also suggests a clear refutation of the excesses of the 1960s.

For the man from Yorba Linda, however, that political knife cut both ways. As the nastiness of Watergate and the alleged associated high crimes and misdemeanors were played out in newspapers and became regular television fare, Nixon's poll numbers plummeted as much of his following began the process of shunning. One might speculate that this occurred not because citizens were unable to believe that Richard Nixon would have been involved in underhanded politics, including burglarizing the offices of a political rival. It might be that Nixon's critical error with the silent majority was not the deed but that he had embarrassed his supporters by getting caught. Those who minded their lawns and spread snow-white paint on their picket fences might not have appreciated foul language on tapes, sloppy break-ins, and slipshod operations that made those they supported appear ignoble and those they loathed appear righteous. Americans might like heroes and gunfighters when they run the riffraff out but they are not supposed to burn the church to the ground on the way out of town. Watergate wasn't so much an evil as it was unsightly. As the late Republican hardball strategist Lee Atwater once quipped, there are reasons why those behind the scenes never tell the public how they "make the sausage."⁶²⁶

It is unlikely that the historical memory of Richard Nixon will ever transcend his contradictions. The president's grand diplomatic gestures and his petty Oval Office vendettas are odd bookends for what was an intriguing career from a master politician. But his personal paradox makes navigation through what was already a very confusing time even more challenging. It is too easy to discard his accomplishments in foreign and domestic policy when examining the excesses of this partisan politician—the pitcher of beltway hard balls and the purveyor of dirty tricks. However, while Richard Nixon was, in the words of speechwriter Bill Safire, the "rock in the snowball," it is clear that the Californian politician could have achieved few of his successes in isolation. And the atmosphere in the White House was not a prevailing isolating darkness from which no one could escape alive. Even the most hard-knuckled of his loyalists understood this reality and proved it with their actions. Instead of dirty tricks, straight-ahead politics guided the actions of many important figures in the Nixon White House. Pat Buchanan, for example, eschewed what he thought were unimportant shenanigans. He believed rightly that the actual campaign was separate from these matters, and consequently, wanted nothing to do with them. Buchanan recalled how he was offered the job to head up the infamous plumbers unit following the release of the Pentagon Papers. "They had some real cowboys in there. And I said to myself, 'I don't want to do this; I'm not an operations officer.' I was very close to Richard Nixon, I could simply say, 'I do not want to do this job. I prefer to do the analysis of the opponents for the campaign of 1972. This is what I'm really good at, you know, and I don't wanna do that.' So they got Bud Krogh....I said no." Buchanan stressed that he would not have "authorized anybody to break in anywhere" as he could never "understand its relevance

⁶²⁶ See Tom Turnipseed's "What Lee Atwater Learned and the Lesson for His Protégés," in the *Washington Post*, April 16, 1991, A19, and John Joseph Brady, *Bad Boy: The Life and Politics of Lee Atwater* (Toronto: HarperCollins Canada, 1997).

or purpose” to getting reelected and that Ellsberg was already indicted over the removal of sensitive files on the Vietnam War from the Pentagon.⁶²⁷

Was this just convenient hindsight? Clearly it was not. As Buchanan wrote in a memorandum to Haldeman and Ehrlichman at that time, “There are some dividends to be derived from Project Ellsberg [sic]—but none to justify the magnitude of the investment recommended.”⁶²⁸ Such choices paid huge dividends. After Watergate, Buchanan went home to his family and Jeb Magruder went to jail. Far from operating under the power and persuasion of a *Svengali*-like master manipulator or a dark isolating structure that consumed and doomed all it touched, Nixon’s men made choices. As the introspective and thoughtful Magruder put it, “It is not enough to blame the atmosphere he created. No one forced me or the others to break the law.”⁶²⁹

Of course all of this reveals why the idea of a ‘Berlin Wall’ is so erroneous, as such a wall would have also limited the perspective of those around the president, preventing them from making informed choices. Certainly Haldeman’s authoritarian role as chief of staff combined with the president’s desire to have his administration run by loyal assets contributed to the appearance of isolation. The foiled break-in, however, has elevated this idea unnecessarily. As Haldeman wrote in his memoirs, “Much has been made of the ‘Berlin Wall’ that I am supposed to have constructed around Nixon.” The argument that his actions isolated the president, prevented “communication with the outside world” and created “a loner who made all his decisions in a complete vacuum” is “completely off the mark.” Haldeman argued with good reason that he and his assistants controlled access in line with the president’s wishes and the nature in which they wanted to run the affairs of state, especially in terms of the domestic political agenda, and the president’s desire to focus more on his passions for foreign policy. Haldeman maintained that controlling Nixon’s schedule was done in order to provide full “access to the advisers he knew would be the most useful.”⁶³⁰ While Haldeman’s claim that former President Lyndon Johnson was much more hamstrung “by his accessibility to everyone” is more than a tad self-serving, his position was that any “wall” he did construct was for the purposes of achieving presidential clarity and effectiveness, allowing the president to see whom he really wanted to see. On this point Haldeman was more right than even he would have cared to admit.⁶³¹

What pushed this operation over the edge occurred when “another character” joined the White House staff. Charles Colson, Haldeman admitted, “encouraged the dark impulses in Nixon’s mind, and *acted* on those impulses instead of ignoring them and letting them die. By 1971, Colson was one of the few on the small list of people who saw the President frequently.” Haldeman recalled how another White House aide had once suggested that, “Haldeman built a wall, but Colson was jumping over the wall.” As the chief of staff later declared, “I must admit he was jumping over with my full knowledge and agreement.” One should take Haldeman at his word on this point, as to argue otherwise would be admitting that the great H.R. Haldeman,

⁶²⁷ Pat Buchanan’s interview piece, “White House Secrets,” appeared on the program, *Hard Target*, on the History Channel, accessed through history.com, April 14, 2009. For more on the Pentagon Papers, please see George Herring, *The Pentagon Papers* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1993), and Daniel Ellsberg, *Secrets: A Memoir of Vietnam and the Pentagon Papers* (New York: Penguin, 2003).

⁶²⁸ Please see Lukas, *Nightmare*, 73.

⁶²⁹ Magruder, *An American Life*, 377.

⁶³⁰ Haldeman, *Ends of Power*, 57-58.

⁶³¹ White, *The Making of the President*, 1972, 223.

keeper, along with Ehrlichman, of the “German Wall” had no real control over what was going on with his president.⁶³²

While Haldeman ignored some of the “orders” the president issued while blowing off steam, he believed that Colson was different, as the attorney was “inside the Oval Office listening enthusiastically to Nixon’s outraged pleas for action against various persons or organizations and promising, ‘Yes sir, I’ll do that for you by tomorrow morning.’”⁶³³ John Mitchell, who did not hide his loathing of Colson from White House staff, confided in Haldeman that Colson was “bad news,” and that he would “get the President in trouble.” When the first news of the Watergate break-in reached Haldeman’s ears, he instinctively believed it was the handiwork of his boss’s special counsel. “I tried to visualize the scene: a darkened political office, burglars prowling, flashlights wavering. Whose operation did that sound like? This led me to my second reaction: ‘Good Lord,’ I thought, ‘they’ve caught Chuck Colson.’”⁶³⁴

Colson of course always denies that he had anything to do with the Watergate break-in, and even though there is no “smoking gun” that proves his guilt, one must wonder about his claims of innocence, not the least of which was that those who knew him best in the White House had feared the worst. John Ehrlichman, for one, believed that Watergate was likely a Colson operation.⁶³⁵ Additionally, and perhaps most importantly, Colson claimed to know how the president really *felt* about things. In his exit interview from the White House staff following the landslide election on January 12, 1973, Colson made it abundantly clear how things really worked in the Nixon administration. “Well . . . when I started I worked really, I mean Haldeman was my direct superior. He is obviously chief of staff, so everyone reports through Haldeman. But I, after the first year, had less and less contact with Haldeman on what I was doing and more and more directly with the President. I guess in the last two years I had, since 1971 and 1972, most of my contact was directly with the President.” Colson also laid out how the basic White House operation worked, especially in the election of 1972 where he had gained such prominence and influence. Although he would “clear things” with Haldeman first, “once you are off and running with something (especially if it was something the President had an interest in), I was normally reporting directly back to the President, or the President would call me and ask me how it was going.” Colson served as that person that Nixon liked to talk to—to bounce issues off on domestic, and even on foreign policy, when Haldeman and Kissinger were not there: “The additional things that would probably be of interest, from the standpoint of writing a history, would be the advice I gave the President, or counsel he sought from me. . .” At specific and “limited” periods, Colson offered that, “Apart from the President himself...I’m probably the only guy who really knew what was going on in his mind.”⁶³⁶

In Colson, Nixon had found the ultimate loyalist, one who would do not only anything the president asked but anything he believed the president wanted done. Haldeman, perhaps the only one capable of stopping it, was too much the true believer to risk being closed out of the

⁶³² Haldeman, *Ends of Power*, 59.

⁶³³ Haldeman, *Ends of Power*, 59.

⁶³⁴ Haldeman, *Ends of Power*, 5.

⁶³⁵ See Ehrlichman, *Witness to Power*, 316-317, 349, 368-369. See also Haldeman, *The Ends of Power*, 5-6, 11-12, 59-61, 142-143, 154, 156-160, 162-164.

⁶³⁶ See the Transcript of the Exit Interview with Charles Colson that took place in the Old Executive Office Building, January 12, 1973, 14, 21, NARA. This communication went both ways. When sequestered at Camp David, the president called for Colson more than he called for his chief of staff.

loop.⁶³⁷ Haldeman claims that Colson and the president were doing things that he paid scant attention to and that he failed to heed the warnings of Ehrlichman. “Yet I preferred running the risk of Colson’s getting out of control to losing his value to me...I felt the benefits outweighed the risks—and that I could keep a close enough rein on the risks to avoid any major disasters.” So for the sake of expediency, the White House chief of staff stood by and let the administration crumble.⁶³⁸ As Theodore White pointed out, “Haldeman’s loyalty lay only to Richard Nixon; and no man served him worse.”⁶³⁹ In the end, however, loyalty was a one-way street. In 1974, as the walls began to close in on his administration, President Nixon refused to pardon Haldeman despite the personal pleas of a man who had stood at his side during the political battles since 1956. When Nixon learned of Haldeman’s death in 1993, he chose to remember the good in his former chief of staff. “He was loyal, a hell of a guy,” Nixon said to his personal assistant Monica Crowley. “And to think about some of the boobs running around today! They couldn’t even shine his shoes.”⁶⁴⁰

With Watergate, Nixon’s loyalists in the heartland abandoned the president like rats scurrying off a sinking ship, while others from his once robust inner circle fell back to the earth, scattered seemingly without purpose like spent leaves in an autumn wind—some to jail, some into personal obscurity, and others to odd forms of political celebrity.⁶⁴¹ Only then was Richard Nixon truly alone and isolated as he fought largely by himself for redemption, struggling for his place in history as scholars and others pondered his legacy and picked at his political corpse. In the end, some of Nixon’s men had mirrored too much of their boss’s darker impulses, the old gunfighter, the communist hunter, the ‘SOB,’ and allowed the president to act on the worst aspects of his complex personality. That White House Chief of Staff Bob Haldeman allowed the president to be alone with the likes of Charles Colson must be viewed as a dereliction of duty, as this “special counsel” was the likeliest candidate to have led Nixon the last few feet towards the edge and into the political abyss. It was a place the man from Yorba Linda had *more* than flirted with for his entire career but one he never fully crossed until he did with the aid and counsel of his most fervent loyalist in his last campaign.

On a damp afternoon in April 1994, Richard Nixon returned to the place from whence he came, buried mere feet from the house and the tiny bedroom where he drew his first breath 81 years earlier. His presidential library sprawls out behind the original modest frame dwelling still standing in Yorba Linda as a testament to all the places he traveled, all the hands he shook, minds he moved, (and those he didn’t) and the millions of his fellow citizens he represented who instinctively agreed with his vision of America. Those visiting the library and birthplace will invariably make their way outside through the building’s thick glass doors into the First Lady’s rose garden and proceed down a lazy path leading to a small gravesite in the shadow of the

⁶³⁷ Chuck Colson admitted on tape to the president that while he had nothing to do with Watergate, he “did a hell of a lot of things on the outside . . . and you never read about it. The things that you read about were the things I didn’t do [laughter in room]. Watergate and Segretti. I had nothing to do with it . . .” That contention was challenged by both the president and Haldeman on the tapes. See WHT Conversation No. 830-6 and 831-6, January 2 and 3, 1973.

⁶³⁸ Haldeman, *Ends of Power*, 319-320.

⁶³⁹ White, *Breach of Faith*, 140.

⁶⁴⁰ Crowley, *Nixon in Winter*, 341-342.

⁶⁴¹ Henry Kissinger, who carried on as a peculiar celebrity, commentator and prognosticator on the world of diplomacy, was seldom kind to his former boss, once stating that “He would have been a great man had somebody loved him.” See MacMillan, *Nixon in China*, 20.

simple country house built by Nixon's father in 1912, a year before the future president was born. Looking east through a small stand of trees towards the home it is possible for visitors to imagine that they are in the middle of a farmyard anywhere in America, and the president was just a simple farmer buried out back by the trees in the family plot. As patrons sit on one of the two small benches adjacent to the grave late in the afternoon, they may see a small multi-colored tabby cat emerge through the brush from the bordering middle-class neighborhood and perch atop the dark granite gravestone. Visitors may watch as the animal calmly grooms its coat oblivious to those who gesture and muse how the late president would appreciate such a bucolic setting—just as they do.

For most of the first three decades following the end of WWII, to those in the great American heartland, Nixon, perhaps more than any other single leader, reflected their hopes, their fears, their creative (and self-destructive) impulses, and their desires to be remembered well. Nixon was not only a risk taker but a winner, one who personified upward mobility. Despite his lofty achievements, Nixon, as with countless of his supporters, had remained resentful of those of 'unearned' privilege and status—all very American traits. They were also characteristics Nixon and his faithful associates marshaled from the countless men and women across the nation who followed and supported him throughout—what few could fail to conclude—was a controversial career. Nixon's legacy *could* have been an attestation to the legitimacy of the *American Dream*: how paltry origins in a rural orange and lemon grove closed with homage and pageantry as the 37th president was laid to rest by a grateful nation. The stirring cadence of his state funeral with its nostalgic and poignant blend of inspiration and melancholy, however, was marred by the unremarkable intonation of regret.

In his speech at Nixon's memorial that April day, President Bill Clinton indicated his hope that history would be favorable to the memory of the late commander-in-chief. Clinton suggested, "...may the day of judging President Nixon on anything less than his entire life and career come to a close."⁶⁴² Historian Stanley Kutler among others responds that Nixon cannot be judged beyond the crimes of Watergate, as those transgressions were indicative of or 'rooted' in his life and career.⁶⁴³ Given the immense and long-standing patronage Richard Nixon received from the American people, an indictment of his entire public career would constitute an indictment of the many millions who faithfully supported his positions, not a pleasant prospect. If in fact Watergate represents in totality the character and substance of Nixon's long tenure in elected office, then history must quarrel not just with the late president but with his benefactors who permitted this politician to become a fixture in public discourse for more than a quarter-century. While Theodore White predicted that Richard Nixon would "mystify even the historians," it is important to remember that Yorba Linda's favorite son was never an enigma to his millions of loyalists.⁶⁴⁴

Behind the ornate presidential desk in the Oval Office, Nixon displayed the bust of his hero, Abraham Lincoln. Lincoln's sage reminder to his fellow Americans was that in this nation, despite the trials and tribulations, citizens must not sever their "bonds of affection" with each other. All those who have occupied the office, including Nixon, have struggled in some manner with this article of faith, and to honor the sacred oath they swore to uphold when they assumed the presidency: That in order to "serve, protect, and defend the Constitution of the United States

⁶⁴² Clinton's comments are taken from a videotaped broadcast of Richard Nixon's memorial service, Nixon Library.

⁶⁴³ Kutler, *The Wars of Watergate*, 617.

⁶⁴⁴ See White, *Breach of Faith*, 79.

of America” it is necessary to defend the rights of friend *and* foe. Privilege demands an enormous and solemn duty. Lincoln’s appeal to the “better angels of our nature” during his first inaugural address in 1861, however, was not reserved for selectmen. No future grants of absolution were bestowed upon anyone, including those in Nixon’s silent majority, who for more than a generation on matters of state germane to other Americans, communicated loudly with their silence, and when it suited them, spoke up with their vote, reelecting in a landslide the knowable and dark Richard Nixon.

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